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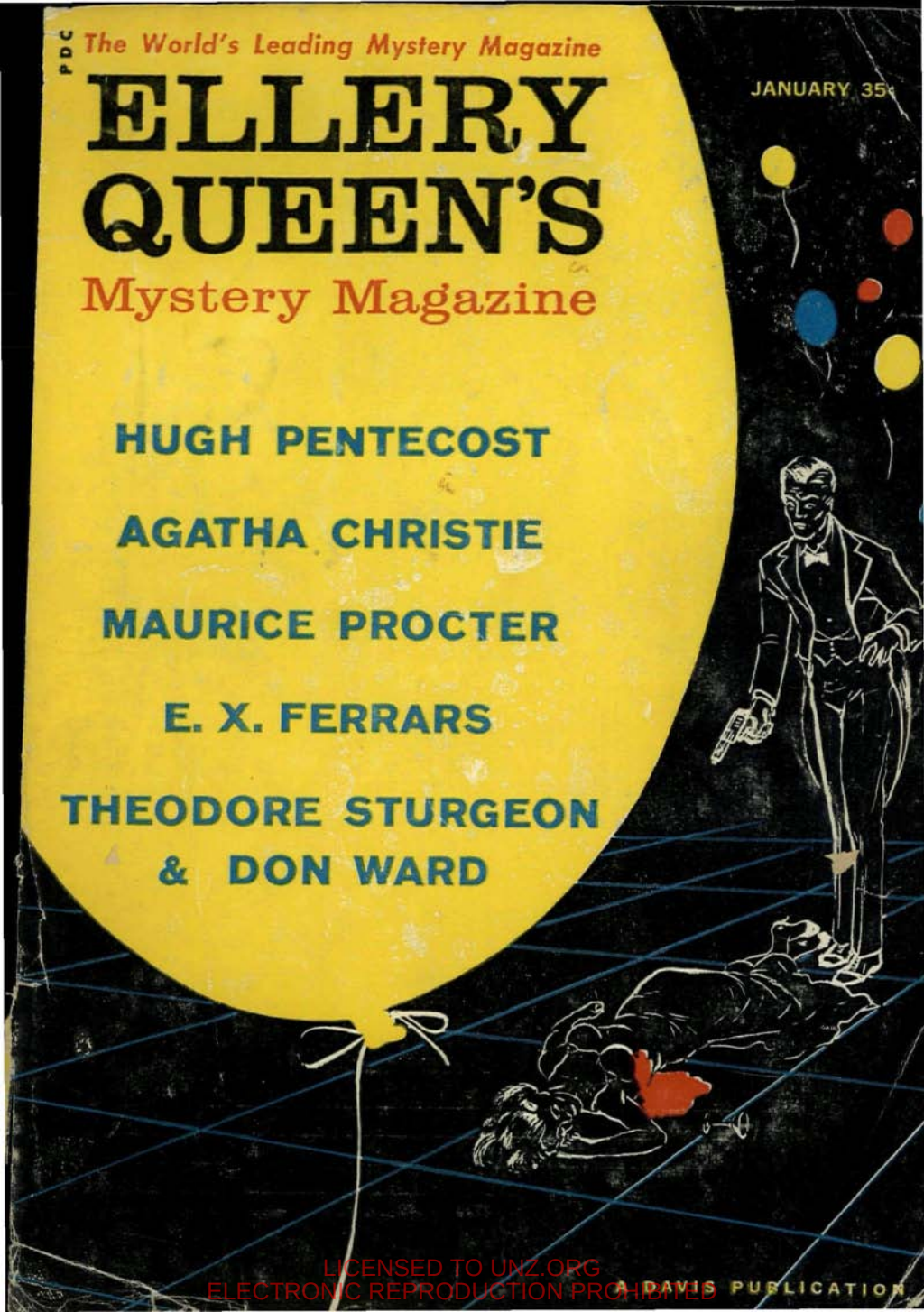

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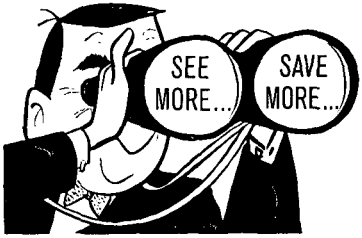

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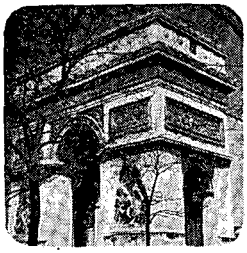

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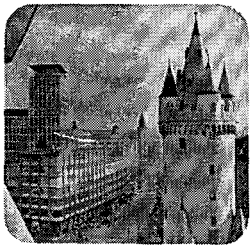

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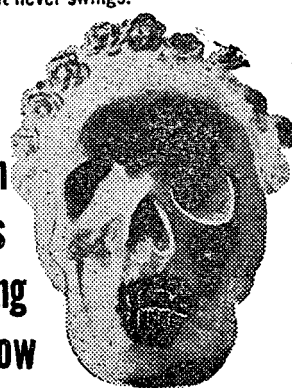

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a new story by

HUGH PENTECOST

My Dear Uncle Sherlock

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HUGH PENTECOST

TITLE: *My Dear Uncle Sherlock*

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Uncle George Crowder

LOCALE: Lakeview, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Uncle George had been reading the "Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes" to twelve-year-old Joey; and then old Mrs. Leggett was murdered, and there was a dog in the night-time . . .*

JOEY TRIMBLE, AGED TWELVE, LOOKing very much overscrubbed and overdressed for a weekday morning, sat meekly in his place at the breakfast table listening to his father's tirade. Hector Trimble, the local druggist, was speaking to his wife, but every word was meant for Joey.

"If it were not," Hector said in his prim way, "for Joey's association with your brother George, I would not be losing half a day's business at the store, and a twelve-year-old boy would not find himself in the incredible position of being a witness in a murder case."

"I don't know what George has to do with the murder of old Mrs. Leggett," Esther Trimble said mildly. "Have some more coffee, Father?"

"I do not wish any more coffee," Hector said. "I merely wish to say what is on my mind, and without interruption, *please!* If it were not for Uncle George, Joey would not have been interesting himself in trying to make friends with a vicious dog that would make friends with no one. If it were not for this absurd attempt to make friends with a vicious dog, Joey would not have discovered the dog dead. If he had not discovered the dog dead, he would not have gone for Trooper Gilligan, and he would not have gone into the house with Trooper

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Gilligan and found old Mrs. Leggett with her throat cut."

"The dog's throat was cut too, Father," Joey said, in an effort to keep the facts straight.

"That is immaterial," Hector said. He turned on his son. "How, may I ask, do you spend these winter afternoons when it is too stormy for you to be wasting your time hunting, or fishing through holes in the ice, or prowling through the woods with George Crowder? Do you take the opportunity to study your mathematics or your history, in both of which you are woefully deficient? You do not! I happen to know exactly what you are doing."

"I—I'm improving my mind," Joey said hesitantly.

Hector snorted. "He's improving his mind! Do you know how he does that, my dear Esther? He goes to your brother George's shack, and there your brother George, who hasn't done a stroke of work in fifteen years, reads aloud to him."

"I don't see any harm in that, Father," Esther Trimble said. "I'd much rather he'd absorb a little literature than watch some of the programs we get on television these days."

"Literature!" Hector rose, cold, dignified, and crossed to the sideboard. He opened a drawer and took out two objects. One was an old fashioned deerstalker cap. The other was a magnifying glass. "Literature!" Hector repeated. "Lurid nonsense! *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes!* Running about the streets in this nonsensical hat! Peering through this glass at footprints in the snow!"

"I believe Sherlock Holmes is considered to be something of a classic these days," Esther Trimble said.

"Classic fol-de-rol!" Hector said. "Cluttering his mind with sensational nonsense. I tell you, Esther—"

"You and Joey will be late, Father," Esther said calmly. "You were called for the Grand Jury hearing at ten o'clock."

"Very well," Hector said. "But just remember, I haven't finished. Tonight I shall—"

"And don't forget to wear your rubbers, Father," Esther Trimble said.

The steam pipes in the jury room at the Lakeview Town Hall pounded steadily like some sort of mechanical pulse. The room was hot and overcrowded, and the air was stale. Hector Trimble and his son Joey sat in the front row of chairs reserved for witnesses. Beside them were old Dave Taylor, custodian of the grammar school and janitor of the Presbyterian Church, who had also taken care of the grounds and the furnace of old Mrs. Leggett, and Trooper Gilligan, who was the resident representative of the State Police in Lakeview.

Across the room to one side sat Bill Leggett and his wife Joan. Bill

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Leggett rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, and his hands were raised to cover his haggard face. Joan Leggett sat beside him, her hand on his arm, her head held high and proud. She was pretty darned beautiful, Joey told himself—old, of course, but just about the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Joey had remarked about it once to his Uncle George who had nodded sagely.

"It is remarkable, Joey," Uncle George had said. "Twenty-five years old and hardly faded a drop!"

Joey knew almost everyone on the jury, especially Red Egan, the foreman. Red used to go hunting in season with Joey and Uncle George and Uncle George's setter Timmy. Next to Uncle George, Red Egan was about the best man in the woods Joey had ever seen. Joey knew that if some day he could be as good as Red Egan he'd be quite happy. Nobody, of course, could be as good as Uncle George.

Young Mr. Patrick Aloysius Molloy, the County Prosecutor, rumpled his thick hair as he glanced at a sheaf of papers in his hand. Finally he turned to the jury. Joey was aware of a happy sigh sweeping over the packed courtroom behind him.

"Gentlemen of the jury," Pat Molloy began. "It is my unhappy task this morning to present some gruesome facts to you to determine whether a just indictment can be handed down against William Leggett for the brutal slaying of his great aunt, Mrs. Lydia Leggett."

"And her dog!" Joey hadn't intended to speak. The words had just popped out of him. There was a snicker behind him, and Hector Trimble blushed scarlet. His hand closed firmly on his son's wrist.

Mr. Patrick Aloysius Molloy knew how to play his cards. He turned the moment to his own advantage. He smiled benignly at Joey. "Our young friend is quite correct. *'And* her dog!' If anything were needed to show the cold-blooded purposefulness of the murderer, the killing of Mrs. Leggett's dog is all that would be needed. The killing of that dog, gentlemen, shows that this brutal crime was premeditated, carefully planned, calculated down to the last detail.

"Through the testimony of certain witnesses, gentlemen of the jury, I propose to establish certain facts, some of them already known to you." Molloy glanced once more at his papers. "I propose to establish the fact that Mrs. Lydia Leggett, aged seventy-seven, had been a widow for twenty-four years. When Mrs. Leggett's husband died, she became something of a recluse, even though she lived on the main street of our town. I have been unable to find a single person in Lakeview who has ever seen Mrs. Leggett outside her house during the past twenty years, or anyone who has ever been inside that

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house. Her supplies, her food and other needs, have been delivered to the back porch of her house over all this time, where the deliverer always found the cash waiting for him.

"Notice that fact, gentlemen—the cash! I propose to show that Mrs. Leggett had no known bank account in this town or anywhere else. She always paid in cash! Even her annual donation of five thousand dollars to the local charity drive was paid in cash. I guess every resident of this community has long been aware of the probability that Mrs. Leggett had a large sum of cash in her possession at all times.

"Imprudent as such behavior may seem, Mrs. Leggett was not entirely without thought of her own protection. Over the years she has had a series of dogs—three, I believe—famous for their qualities as watchdogs. The most recent—a German police dog named Shep—was, as you know, something of a marvel to the village. It never went outside the picket fence that surrounds Mrs. Leggett's house. It never barked indiscriminately. But let anyone so much as put a hand on the fence gate and Shep would announce the fact with sharp, vicious barking. If anyone had the temerity to open the gate and step inside, that person was liable to savage attack. Mr. Dave Taylor, who did odd jobs for Mrs. Leggett, was the only person in Lakeview whom Shep would tolerate. Mr. Taylor will testify to this—and to the really dangerous and extraordinary qualities as a watchdog that Shep possessed.

"Another witness to the characteristics of Shep will be Trooper Gilligan, who, as all of you know, lives in the house adjoining Mrs. Leggetts. And young Master Joey Trimble, who was good enough to remind us of Shep—" Molloy smiled warmly at Joey, "and who has a reputation for being an extremely good handler of hunting dogs despite his meagre years, will testify that he had tried to make friends with Shep, but to no avail.

"Now, gentlemen, this same Master Joey Trimble is in the habit of rising early. It stormed the night before last, as you may recall, but the next morning was bright and clear. Young Master Trimble, ambling along Main Street at about six A.M., paused outside the picket fence surrounding Mrs. Leggett's house, his mind no doubt involved with the project of making friends with Shep. But suddenly he became aware he would never have the opportunity to achieve his goal, for he saw Shep lying on the back porch of the house in a welter of blood. Young Master Trimble saw at a glance that the dog was dead.

"Using his head admirably, Young Master Trimble ran to Trooper Gilligan's house and summoned aid. He and Trooper Gilligan proceeded to Mrs. Leggett's

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back porch where they saw the dog had been dead for some time. The body was frozen stiff. They could see the gaping wound where the faithful animal's throat had been cut.

"They then entered the Leggett house. The place, Trooper Gilligan will testify, looked as if it had been struck by a cyclone—furniture overturned, drawers ripped out and emptied, upholstery slashed, and dishes scattered. And at the foot of the stairs lay old Mrs. Leggett. Like the dog, her throat had been cut."

Molloy waited for this to sink in.

"Bear in mind, gentlemen, no one could have entered that house without a loud and fierce warning from Shep. Bear in mind that Trooper Gilligan was at home next door the entire evening and night, and will swear there was no such outcry. We know why. The dog was destroyed to keep it quiet. Only one person could have entered that yard without Shep's giving the alarm—old Dave Taylor." Molloy glanced at the witness sitting next to Hector. "Shep would have allowed Dave to enter without protest. It must become immediately obvious that the one person who had safe access to the house, Dave Taylor, is cleared by this very fact. It would not have been necessary for him to kill the dog. Shep would have let him pass without protest.

"Gentlemen, the motive for this brutal crime is obvious. Money—the considerable sum in cash known to be secreted by Mrs. Leggett. It will be my unpleasant duty, gentlemen, to show that William Leggett, great nephew of the deceased, was in desperate need of funds. William Leggett, as we all know, has no permanent employment. It is no secret that as recently as ten days ago his car was repossessed by the finance company. It is no secret that he had attempted to borrow from his great aunt, but without success. I will show that he made a public attempt—over the phone in the bar at the Red Lion—early on the evening of the murder, and was turned down.

"I will show, through witnesses, that he made threats against his aunt in public after that refusal. I will show, through witnesses, that he was seen loitering outside the fence of Mrs. Leggett's house later that evening. William Leggett says he was trying to get up the nerve to ask his aunt for money face to face, but that he lost his nerve and went home. It will be my task to cast more than reasonable doubt on that story, gentlemen—to convince you, as I am convinced, that William Leggett waited until his great aunt had let her dog, Shep, out for the last time that night, that he crept up on the dog and cut its throat, that he then entered the house and did away with his aunt in the same manner, and then proceeded—for what must have been

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hours—to search for the money. And now, gentlemen, if there are no questions I shall call my first witness."

"I got a question, Pat," Red Egan said from the jury box. "Does William Leggett have legal counsel for this here hearing?"

"Mr. Leggett has waived his right to counsel," Molloy said. "He is without funds to engage counsel. Of course, if he is indicted and brought to trial, the court will appoint an attorney to conduct his defense."

A familiar voice, clear and dry, made Joey Trimble jerk his head around. It came from the back of the courtroom. Old George Crowder stood there, tall and angular. His clear blue eyes were frosty-cold. "I would be happy to represent William Leggett—funds or no funds," Uncle George said. "Shouldn't take over five minutes, Mr. Molloy, to show that you're wasting the town's money, and worse than that, you're wasting the town's time. Money you can dig up somewhere, but you can never recover time."

Hector Trimble lowered his head. His shiftless brother-in-law was about to make fools of them. True, George Crowder had been a brilliant lawyer years ago—he'd been County Prosecutor like Molloy; but he'd sent a man to the electric chair for murder—a man who later had been proved innocent—and he'd dropped his practice, moved into the woods, and become a shiftless ne'er-do-well and the particular burden of Hector's life.

Patrick Aloysius Molloy regarded Uncle George without pleasure. He had had a few encounters with the old man, and none of them had turned out happily for Molloy. He turned, scowling, to the young Leggetts. "Do you wish to avail yourselves of Mr. Crowder's offer?"

Bill Leggett nodded. Joan Leggett, her head still high, spoke in a clear voice. "We'd be proud and grateful."

There was a murmur of excitement as Uncle George made his way down the aisle. Uncle George, they knew, was a "character"—you could expect something entertaining from him.

Uncle George paused by Joey's chair and put his strong bony hand on Joey's shoulder. He winked down at his nephew. "The facts seem rather obvious, don't they, my dear Watson?"

Joey blinked. "N-no, sir," he said.

"Tut, tut, Watson, where are your powers of observation? I think we shall have to give the prosecutor a few hints."

"This is not a place for fancy games, Mr. Crowder," Molloy said angrily.

"Quite so," Uncle George said. "My apologies. But my nephew and I have recently been reading the works of Doctor A. Conan

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Doyle and we kind of got into the habit of talking to each other that way."

"George!" Hector whispered, shocked. Enough was enough—this was a court of law!

"My client isn't the murderer, however, Mr. Molloy. Just from hearing the facts I can tell you quite a few things about the real murderer." Again Uncle George glanced at Joey, his eyes twinkling. "The murderer, my dear Molloy, is about five feet seven inches tall, gray-haired, left-handed, suffering from arthritis, carries a clasp knife with a badly nicked blade, chews tobacco, is a teetotaler, suffers from astigmatism which he corrects with glasses when he reads, and voted for Adlai Stevenson in the last Presidential election." Uncle George beamed at the gaping Molloy. "My client fits absolutely none of those descriptive facts, Mr. Prosecutor, and so I demand his release. However, with the facts I've given you, you should have very little trouble putting your hands on the guilty party."

Molloy banged his fist on the railing in front of the jury box. "What kind of outrageous nonsense are you trying to hand us?" he shouted.

"Not nonsense," Uncle George said calmly. "Accurate and factual."

Old Dave Taylor, sitting next to Hector Trimble, chuckled. "Funny thing, Mr. Crowder," he said, "but that description of yours fits me to a T. But everyone knows it wasn't me, because I was the one person who wouldn't have had to kill the dog. Shep wouldn't have done no barking at me."

The twinkle had gone out of Uncle George's eyes and they were colder now than the winter sky outside the courtroom windows. "On the contrary, Dave, you're the one person, more than any other, *who had to kill the dog*. If Mrs. Leggett was found murdered and her house ransacked and the dog alive—and Trooper Gilligan right next door to testify that the dog never barked—you'd have been chucked in jail before you could say 'Dave Taylor.' You *had* to kill the dog, Dave."

Old Dave Taylor's face seemed suddenly to go out of focus. "But I tell you—"

"Don't tell me anything, Dave," Uncle George said. "I don't know about you, Mr. Molloy, but Red Egan, the honorable foreman of this jury, knows something about dogs. How much chance would a man have, Red, sneaking up over that crisp, dry snow and grabbing that dog and cutting its throat without the dog setting up a holler long before the murderer could get close enough to lay a hand on Shep?"

Red Egan shook his head slowly, a broad grin spreading over his face. Uncle George turned back to Molloy.

"If the dog had been shot or poisoned—well, we might have an ar-

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gument, Molloy. But someone got close enough to Shep to take hold of the dog and put a knife to its throat without Shep's letting out a single yip! There wasn't a living soul but Dave who could do that—not anyone at all."

The courtroom was suddenly noisy with excitement. Old Dave Taylor was shouting at the top of his lungs: "I couldn't stand it no longer. Her with all that money, and never a Christmas present, never an extra dime, never nothing. In twenty-four long years—"

Trooper Gilligan took old Dave by the arm. "Come on, Dave."

Bill Leggett was pounding Uncle George's back and Joan Leggett's eyes were bright as two stars.

"You old fraud!" Bill cried. "Most of it I admit you could see if you knew where to look. But how did you know about the knife—and him voting for Stevenson?"

"Been fishing with him," Uncle George said. "Seen him clean a catch with that knife. And being a Democrat myself, I happen to know he's one of only a dozen registered Democrats in the whole town of Lakeview." Uncle George looked down at Joey. "I fear when these little problems have been solved and explained they seem altogether too elementary, my dear Watson."

Joey hugged himself with delight. "Amazing, my dear Uncle Sherlock," he said. "Amazing!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DICK ASHBAUGH**

TITLE: ***The Hope Chest***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: Just before Christmas

COMMENTS: *The regulars at O'Grady's Bar & Grill felt sorry for Federal Ryan—Federal was that kind of pathetic little guy. And then the little guy got himself into a real jam . . .*

IF NOTHING ELSE, FEDERAL RYAN'S trouble with stolen money certainly gave the bunch around O'Grady's Bar and Grill plenty to talk about over their beer. It was just before Christmas, and one of the wits reading the headlines that evening said, "Now there's a switch for you—'Man Robs Department Store.' Usually at Christmas time it's the other way around." Everybody laughed, but no one would have believed in a million years that a quiet little guy like Federal Ryan could be involved in such a thing. Just the idea of Federal Ryan and $18,000 together would have been something to laugh about.

Talking it over at the place later, Tom O'Grady the owner was telling some of us how it all started. He remembered Federal coming in as usual that morning around ten or ten-thirty, on his way to the grocery. Federal lives with his sister, Jenny, in a little frame-and-half-brick down the street. Jenny's an invalid—been in a wheel chair for years on account of polio when she was just a young girl. She's maybe in her fifties now, but Federal always refers to her as The Kid, and he's very good about taking care of her—very devoted, you might say. He has his social security, and what with odd jobs now and then, they manage. Certainly nothing fancy, you understand, but they get by.

This particular morning, Al Banner, the rice salesman, was sitting at the bar looking over the track entries for the day. Al makes

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good money and likes to spend it in a open, loud-mouthed way. No harm in him, really, just a bit noisy about his affairs. He looked over at Federal sitting there in his frayed old overcoat, nursing his small beer, and Al said in a kidding way, "Federal, here's a horse you ought to get down on. A filly named Gentle Jenny running in the second race at Hialeah. A long shot. Might make enough to buy yourself a new fiddle and flute."

"Oh, sure," said Federal. "Now where would I get money for a horse bet?"

Al sat there stirring his bonded-on-the-rocks for a minute, then he said, "I got a hunch, Federal. There's a horse going in the first race I like. I think I'll pair 'em for the daily double. Win, I split with you. Lose, we forget it."

"Why should you do this for me?" Federal asked dryly.

Al shrugged. "So it's Christmas, and I've got the holiday spirit."

A couple of the regulars piped up. "Take him up on it, Federal. You got witnesses."

Federal just grunted and probably forgot the whole thing then and there.

When he came in the next morning Tom O'Grady banged the cash register and came up to where Federal was sitting. "Al Banner left this for you," he said, and counted out $78 there on the bartop. "He beefed, but he left it."

"We ganged up on him," grinned a regular. "That daily double come in and paid one-five-six. We wasn't about to let him forget it."

Federal just sat there stunned. Finally he picked up the money and his hand was trembling. "It couldn't have come a better time," he said. "Just before Christmas. Thank Al for me." Then he bought a round, which is customary when anybody wins a bet or a pool. Only a half dozen morning beers, and a cigar for the porter, Truelove, who don't drink, so it didn't run him much.

The rest of the story we jigsawed together later. What he done was go out and get on a bus and ride downtown to Fenwick's. Then he climbed the stairs up to the sixth floor furniture department because he hates elevators. He looked around for Matt Donovan's oldest boy, Terry, who has worked there for a number of years.

"Terry," he said, "I want to buy a hope chest for The Kid. A good one."

At first Terry thought he was joking and almost broke out laughing, then he saw Federal was serious. "Certainly, Federal," he said, shooting his cuffs and getting clerical the way salesmen do when they got themselves a pigeon. "Just step over here." After about a half hour, when he'd shown him everything in the place, Terry said, "I can't figure what you want, Federal. These are the

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very latest models. There isn't a better line in town."

"They're too plain," said Federal. "I got in mind something with carving onto it—genuine hand-carving."

Terry thought a minute, then snapped his fingers. "I think I've got just what you want," he said. "It's been kicking around the floor as long as I can remember, so I can get you a good price on it."

He took Federal back to a storage room and showed him this chest. Federal's eyes lit up like a new church. It was a monstrous big thing with cupids and hearts carved all over it. "That's it, Terry," he said. "That's the one I want. How much?"

"Well, the tag says $299.99, but don't pay any attention to that. If I had my way, we'd pay you to take it out of here. Wait'll I look at our card on it."

He came back in a few minutes and said, "I can knock it down for $150. That's our actual cost."

Federal groaned. "There's the catch. I only got about half that."

"Hmm," said Terry. "Well, maybe we can work it out this way. Put the balance on our budget payment plan. That way I can send it out to the house and you pay later. Maybe a dollar and a half a week or so."

"Fat chance I got of getting credit," said Federal. "With just my social security and a few odd jobs coming in."

"We'll work it out," said Terry, busy writing out the sales slip. "You go on up to the credit department on seven and ask for Mrs. Sloan. I'll call up there and pave the way. I'm sure it'll be okay."

"I don't know," said Federal uneasily. "I don't like to get involved in something maybe I can't keep up my end." But he kept looking at the chest meantime, rubbing his hand over the fat little genuine hand-carved cupids.

"Nothing to worry about, Federal. As a matter of fact, I'm planning some painting out at the house. You could give me a hand and make enough to pay this off. Now, when do you want it delivered? We've got trucks in that end of town tomorrow."

"Well, okay," said Federal. "Anytime tomorrow is okay. Jenny's always there. I wanted to surprise her, but how you going to hide a big lump of a thing like this?"

"It's a deal," said Terry. "Here, you better take the keys. They might get lost in delivery."

Federal stuck the keys in his pocket and went on up the stairs to the seventh floor where you sign your life away. This Mrs. Sloan was very nice. She had everything all written up in a few minutes, and Federal walked out owning the hope chest.

He couldn't resist going back downstairs to take another look at the huge thing there in the storage room. Terry had hung a big red

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Sold tag on it which made everything official, and the tag gave Federal a sort of pride of ownership. It was dark in the storage room and he couldn't find the light switch, so he pushed the chest out into the hallway by the stairs. He unlocked the lid and looked inside at all the wonderful compartments and sliding trays and things, and he took a deep breath of the fine smell of cedarwood they use in these chests. All in all, it was a pretty big moment for Federal, and he had an even better one going for him when Jenny got her first look.

What happened in the next few minutes nearly ruined everything and left Federal heading straight for prison. The first thing he heard was this signal system they have in department stores bonging away right over his head. A few moments later there was some commotion up the steps and a door crashed open. He looked up to see a man tumbling down the stairs toward him in an awful hurry, banging back and forth from the wall to the railing. The man carried a shopping bag, the regular kind you get in the store. When he noticed Federal standing there in his way, he swung his arm up and half lunged toward him. He saw the chest too late and cracked into it just below his knees. It sent him sprawling on his face and he slid on across the top of the chest headfirst.

Federal's first thought was to help the man to his feet, but when he reached down the man staggered up and all Federal got for his pains was a clout on the side of the head. There was some milling around, with Federal in a half daze from the clout, and then the man was gone, and Federal could hear his feet rattling down the steps far below.

Even before he stopped shaking, Federal shoved the chest back into the storage room in case there was any more wild traffic down those steps. After all, it was his property now and there was no point in getting it all scuffed up. He had it hauled back into place before he saw the shopping bag wedged down behind the chest. He tugged it out and held it so he could see what was inside by the light from the hall. It was such a queer place for money to be—there in that paper shopping bag—that at first he couldn't believe his eyes. Then he took some of the flat bundles out and riffled them. It was money, all right—more money than Federal had ever seen in one place in his life.

Standing there holding that money, Federal had the queerest feeling he had ever known. It was like the whole world had opened up and he could see dazzling things—things like sunny beaches and warm sand and platters of golden fried chicken and all the cold, sparkling beer he could

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drink. He could see The Kid, sitting there in her wheel chair in the sun looking at the ocean, and wearing some kind of a pretty pink dress that fluttered in the breeze.

He closed the door of the storage room and stood there in the dark listening. Once or twice feet pounded past him going down the stairs, and there were other sounds muffled and far away. Through the wall next to him he could hear the cables of the service elevator whirring and clanking. When things quieted down he raised the lid of the chest, stuffed the shopping bag in the lowest compartment, and pulled the lid back into place. Then he locked the chest, dropped the keys in his pocket, and went on out the service doors to the furniture department.

Walking toward the main stairway, he had to fight himself every foot of the way to keep from breaking into a run. The signal system was still bonging away, and he saw two policemen running up the escalator steps toward the seventh floor. He was almost to the steps when he heard his name called, and he broke out in a cold sweat. It was Terry Donovan coming toward him with his hand out.

"Everything okay, Federal?" he asked.

"I guess so," said Federal. "I guess everything's okay."

"Fine, fine," said Terry. "We'll have it on delivery sometime tomorrow afternoon." Then he thanked him for the business, and said he'd give him a ring when he got ready to do the work out at the house.

That evening around O'Grady's several of us noticed Federal acting quieter than usual, and having his beer down at one end of the bar by himself. It was bowling night and there is a lot of action and considerable laughing and kidding going on between the teams that drift over from the alleys across the street. Federal always enjoyed bowling night, but this evening he just sat there by himself—just sat there staring into space.

Once, when Tom O'Grady walked by, Federal stopped him and asked if Frank would be around that night. Frank is Tom's brother, an attorney, and always helps out anybody around the place with legal troubles. He's in a big office downtown and does very well, but around the place he advises the regulars, oftentimes charging very little or nothing at all, depending.

There was quite a bit of talk about the holdup at Fenwick's, and how the gunman got away with a shopping bag stuffed with money. Approximately $18,000, the papers said, and the first time the store ever had a robbery. The bandit escaped down the service stairs and out over the loading docks, and the police didn't have much to

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go on. Nobody could figure out how he got through a couple of locked doors on the seventh floor, and into the room where the money was. He grabbed it just a few minutes before the armored truck men came in to make their pickup. All the time the talk was going on, Federal just sat there at the end of the bar, staring into his beer and saying nothing.

It must have been a bad night for Federal, trying to sleep and thinking of that money and all. And when he came into the place the next morning, he was gray around the gills, and there were big circles under his eyes. Several of us remarked about it, and asked if he was sick. Tom O'Grady fixed him a hot toddy and put a stiff belt of whiskey in it—bonded, not the bar whiskey. Federal protested he wasn't sick, but Tom made him drink it anyhow. Federal is the kind of pathetic little guy it is easy to feel sorry for, somehow or other. If you're healthy and making a dollar, and your mother-in-law hasn't moved in, it makes you feel guilty just looking at him.

Federal was in and out of the place a half dozen times that day, which, come to think of it, was odd for him. Usually he made a morning stop on the way to the grocery, then spent most of the day doing things around the house that Jenny couldn't get at being in the wheel chair and all. After supper he'd be back to sit with the evening crowd a while, Jenny being okay with her TV programs.

It was about three o'clock that afternoon, and hardly anybody in the place, when Frank O'Grady came in to see Tom about something or other. He went on down to the little office they have in the basement and was there about fifteen minutes. Federal nodded to Frank when he came in, but said nothing to him. Once or twice when Frank was downstairs, Federal got up and started for the door like he was leaving, but then he turned around and came back to his place at the bar.

When Frank came upstairs, he stopped at the bar to buy a round for the boys, as he often does. Federal walked over and said something to him in a low voice. Frank nodded and they walked to a back table near the pinball machines. Some of the regulars wondered what it was all about—not being particularly nosey, you understand, just wondering. They could see Federal was doing all the talking, and Frank just listened, his chin on his hand and leaning forward a little like a priest hearing confession.

The upshot of the talk came out later, of course. Not that Frank said anything, Federal being his client and all, but from what happened it was possible to put the pieces together. Actually, Federal told Frank the whole story, right from the beginning.

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At the windup he said, "Frank, I don't know why I done it. I don't know what got into me. I don't want the money."

"I'm sorry you didn't get hold of me sooner," said Frank. "If we could have stopped the delivery the whole thing would be simple. When did the truck get to your house?"

"About an hour ago," said Federal. "I started home and I saw the truck in front of the house, so I turned and came back here. I just didn't have the nerve to face Jenny. She'd never have anything to do with that kind of money. I must have been out of my mind."

"If the money had never left the store premises," said Frank, "we could work out something. Even if it was still up there locked in the chest. The way it stands now you could be charged with concealing stolen property. And that's a pretty serious rap."

"But I haven't laid a hand on the money," said Federal. "It's down there at the house locked up in the chest. Jenny couldn't even open it because I got the keys. And God knows what she's thinking about the whole thing by now."

"Well," said Frank, "the first thing to do is get the money and turn it over to the police. I play golf with young Pete Fenwick and maybe I can talk to him, but it's the police I'm really concerned with. This is a big case and they'll have to make a showing. The store will probably be happy just to get the money back."

"Will it have to be in the papers, Frank?" asked Federal anxiously. "That's the part I hate. I'll take what medicine is coming to me, but it'll be awful for Jenny."

"I know, Federal, and I'm sorry," said Frank. "But this is a big story, and there wouldn't be a chance of keeping it out of the papers."

Frank drove his car to the house, even though it was just down the street. "No use in upsetting Jenny right now," he said. "Suppose you go on in, make some excuse, and get the money. I'll wait outside."

They pulled around in back, and Federal went in while Frank waited in the car. He waited maybe twenty minutes, or even longer, probably wondering what was taking so long.

When Federal came out he was empty-handed. He walked across and slid into the seat next to Frank without a word. For a few minutes he just sat there looking around the place like he'd never seen it before. "Frank," he said finally, "I guess maybe everything will be all right after all."

"I hope so, Federal," said Frank. "But you'll have to return the money."

"I don't have to worry about the money, Frank. It was Jenny saved me that trouble. She said all my life

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I been doing things for her, and she wasn't going to let me buy her a hope chest. She wants me to take the money I spent on the thing and buy myself a decent overcoat." He gave a deep sigh and pulled at the frayed place on his coat. "Jenny made them take the hope chest back, Frank. They never even unloaded it off the truck. Is that good, or is it bad?" He awaited Frank's reply anxiously.

Frank reached over and switched on the ignition. "It's good, Federal," he said, "better than you think. Give my best to Jenny—and Merry Christmas."

"It will be," Federal said, "—now." He straightened his shoulders as Frank drove away.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MAURICE PROCTER**
TITLE:	***The Million Dollar Mystery***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	T-Man Norton and Chief Inspector Warwick
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Ingredients: $1,000,000 of stolen currency; £1,000,000 of stolen diamonds; the murder of an atomic scientist—and sheer melodrama of which there is too little in fiction these psychiatric days . . .*

UPON HIS ARRIVAL, THE UNITED States Treasury agent conformed to the usual practice of visiting detectives: he notified the local force of his presence. The local force, in this instance, was the London Metropolitan Police, and the station at which he presented himself was New Scotland Yard.

Because his mission was a "foreign inquiry," the Treasury agent, John Norton, was introduced to Chief Inspector Warwick of the Special Branch. And from the beginning Warwick was interested. Norton was chasing one million dollars in stolen currency, and pursuit of money is always interesting.

It was a bright winter morning and sunshine warmed the room as the American and the Englishman sat and talked—and took each other's measure. They liked each other immediately. Each man knew his business and neither was noticeably vain about it. And they shared a relentless determination in their pursuit of criminals.

Norton had produced photographs of the man he was after. Warwick studied them. "Ralph Mercer," he said, reading the name.

Mercer had a bull neck, a handsome face, and a carefree grin. Probably the pictures had been taken when he was beginning a term in an American prison, but he didn't look at all worried.

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"Cheerful geezer," Warwick commented. "And he brought the money over here to make a deal? What's he after? Narcotics?"

"He never handles narcotics. He was a jeweler at one time."

"I see. But—a million dollars' worth of diamonds?"

"That's right."

"H'm." Warwick seemed doubtful. Norton waited quietly.

"Where would anybody steal a million dollars?" asked the Scotland Yard man. "From a bank?"

"It was lifted from a United States Treasury office."

"Stolen from the *Treasury!*"

"From an office belonging to the Treasury. It was money that had never been issued. I have the numbers of the bills."

"Did Mercer do the job?"

"No. He doesn't even know the money is stolen. It's top secret. If it leaks out, heads will roll in the Treasury."

"I can well imagine it. Just what happened?"

"A guy called Danny Bolinski started it. He's a hanger-on in a big criminal outfit. He located the money, but he left it alone for a while because he knew it'd be red hot. Then he heard that Mercer was trying to raise capital to bring a big parcel of diamonds from England. Mercer has a reputation with diamonds and he's done a lot of illegal importing. Bolinski approached Mercer and said he was acting for his boss in the outfit. He said there was a million available to buy diamonds. Knowing the outfit, Mercer believed him. He got ready to come to England. Right on the deadline Bolinski cracked the joint, got the money, and sent Mercer away with it before it burned his fingers. He knew Mercer would play it straight because he wouldn't dare double-cross the top man."

Warkick grinned appreciatively. "Oh, very neat!" he said.

"The only thing wrong with it, for Bolinski, is that we picked him up and made him talk."

"This will be *very* interesting. Diamonds, probably stolen, sold for a stolen million. What a lovely crooked job!"

"Glad you like it," said Norton. "I want that money. I couldn't care less about the diamonds."

"I'll take the diamonds. I hope Mercer isn't expecting interference. Will he know you're walking right behind him?"

"I don't think so. He doesn't know how hot the money is. I figure he'll only take the normal precautions."

"What about the contact with this side? Somebody had to dig up a million dollars' worth of diamonds. Did Bolinski know anything about that?"

The American shook his head. "Not much," he said. "Only a name he heard. A man called Hunziger."

Warwick sat back in his chair and stared at his visitor. "You're

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sure it's Hunziger?" he asked in a peculiar tone.

"That was the name, all right. He didn't know the first name."

"Oh, my dear fellow," said the Scotland Yard man. "Any policeman in England would give two fingers and a toe to get hold of Hunziger. Know what you've done? Walked smack into the middle of the biggest murder job in years. It's only two hours old, but it's started a Security flap from one end of Whitehall to the other."

Warwick pushed a file of documents across the desk; then he picked up a telephone and dialed a number.

Norton was professionally interested in a specimen of Scotland Yard paper work. He read the brief array of facts which preceded an inquiry from a superintendent of the murder squad. The superintendent was asking the Special Branch for information about Frederick Tempest, O.M., Ph.D., D.Sc., etc., who had been found strangled with a length of cord in his bachelor apartment that morning. The crime had been committed between eleven and twelve o'clock the previous night.

Reading on, Norton could readily understand the agitation in Whitehall. Tempest had been a nuclear fission man, and though he had withdrawn from government-sponsored atomic work after Hiroshima, his head had still been full of dangerous knowledge.

Hunziger was clearly implicated. His fingerprints had been found all over Tempest's flat and the bowstring was known to be his favorite method of murder. To the American agent it seemed entirely probable that the killing had some connection with his own mission in London.

"Yeah, I walked into it," he agreed, as Warwick put down the telephone.

"Yes. It ties in with your information. Hunziger is an extremely successful jewel thief and diamonds are his specialty."

"Tell me about him."

"I wish I could, old boy," was Warwick's regretful answer. "We've been after him for six years and we don't even know what he looks like. The only thing we've got on him are his fingerprints. In six years he's done seven big jewel jobs and three of them have been murders. For a long time we just called him Mr. Prints. Then we got a name, Hunziger, from a dying man. He's a queer type. He cases his jobs thoroughly, but when he cracks them he leaves his dabs all over the place, as if he doesn't care. Our fingerprint men simply go along and puff their dust around, and there you are—Hunziger again."

"Do all his murders have a robbery motive?"

"Yes, except this fourth murder, which doesn't seem to have any motive. We can't even guess what

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Hunziger could want from Tempest."

"Could Tempest have been in some diamond racket? Smuggling, for instance?"

"That's always possible, but I'd say it's very unlikely. I'd say Tempest was honest."

"A good guy, huh?"

"A great man, I always thought. I met him a number of times when I was working on security with M.I.5. I don't think he was greatly interested in money."

"I'm figuring he was interested in diamonds. I can't see Hunziger, whoever he is, handling a million-dollar deal and a murder at the same time, unless it's all the same job."

"Nor I," Warwick agreed. "If we find Mercer we may get next to Hunziger. In any case, we must locate your man as soon as possible. A million dollars . . ."

"A murderous sum," said Norton.

An American in London is just as easily identified as an Englishman in Chicago. That afternoon Ralph Mercer ventured out of doors, under the impression that he looked like a Londoner. He was spotted in the Strand and followed to a small hotel in Norfolk Street.

The police closed in suddenly on Mercer's hotel room and he was arrested without violence. When he was searched, a shallow, polished leather box full of gems was found in his pocket. It was a fabulous collection: four hundred large, perfect white diamonds. Evidently Mercer wasn't expecting the police. Evidently, too, since he carried so much treasure so nonchalantly, he had some reliable way of avoiding customs barriers.

When Norton openly admired the diamonds Mercer glared at him. "You an American?" he demanded. "Why are you here with the limey cops?"

"That money Bolinski gave you was stolen from a United States government office," Norton said coldly.

Mercer was too shocked to answer.

A search crew was left in the room and the prisoner was taken to the nearest police station. There he was interrogated but he wouldn't talk.

"Too bad," Warwick said to Norton, when the questioning was over. "We'll leave it until we know something about those stones. I'll get Grafton Devine. He's the expert we usually consult. There's money just in *knowing* about diamonds, man. Devine is about the top independent expert in London, and he does damn' well for himself."

But Mr. Devine was not available. He was away on business, his secretary said. So Warwick called up Tim Lake, a small, spare, lively man from the Precious Stone Laboratory in Hatton Garden. Lake arrived with a suitcase full of instruments and his glance immedi-

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ately focused on the box of diamonds.

"Is this the stuff?" he asked. At Warwick's nod he opened the box and stood staring at the contents in utter astonishment.

"Are they diamonds?" Inspector Warwick asked.

"My goodness, yes! And *what* diamonds! Heavens, man, where did you get this lot?"

The refracted sunlight made the close-packed gems seem to burn with ten thousand points of white fire.

"What will they be worth?" Norton asked.

"A million pounds, I shouldn't wonder," said Lake. He picked up a ten-carat brilliant and turned it in the sunlight. It threw out rays like a star.

He set to work, picking out diamonds at random and testing them with a small square plate of polished corundum. They scratched the plate easily. "Nothing in the world like a diamond," Lake said fondly. "As old as the earth, as clear as spring water, as indestructible as faith."

He opened a black leather case and produced an instrument which looked like a baby ciné camera. "Rutile refractometer," he explained. "Absolutely the latest thing. Gives you readings you wouldn't believe."

He fiddled with the new toy for some time; then he said, as he peered through the eyepiece, "Lovely reading. Two point four one seven. It couldn't be anything else but a diamond with a refraction like that."

Lake's next instrument was a binocular microscope with a queer, built-in lighting arrangement. He plugged it into a wall socket. "Now," he said. "I'll see if I can tell you where these stones were mined."

He put a large brilliant on the cradle and stared through the eyepiece. At once there was a subtle change in his attitude. For a long time he was quite still, and the watching men grew tense.

At last Lake put the brilliant aside and picked up a baton diamond, a polished oblong of great beauty. Then he tried an emerald-cut, then another brilliant. Presently he looked up.

"I've never seen anything like the inclusions in these stones," he said in a worried voice. "It seems incredible, impossible, almost—but . . ."

He had another long look through the microscope, then he stood up straight. "It's quite incredible," he said, "but I feel sure these diamonds are not natural stones."

"You mean they're artificial?" Warwick asked quickly.

"Products of human artifice, yes. They're synthetic."

Mercer had been present throughout the examination and his comment was a rude word.

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Tim Lake looked at him with sympathy. Of all the men there, Lake was the one most capable of understanding the onetime jeweler's scorn and disbelief.

"They're really fine gems," he said, seeming to apologize for the stones. "They're as hard and bright as diamonds. In fact, they *are* diamonds—but not natural stones. It's a great pity. Such lovely, clean gems."

"What are you guys trying to pull?" Mercer demanded. "There's no such thing as a synthetic diamond."

"It had to come sometime," Lake said. "Sooner or later somebody was bound to find out how to make a diamond. Synthetic sapphires and emeralds have been on the market for years."

"Diamonds are different," Mercer said stubbornly. "Nobody could make a diamond."

"It certainly is hard to believe," said Lake. He became thoughtful. "There is one more test I can do here. Could we have these blinds down, Chief Inspector?"

Warwick switched on the lights and pulled down the blinds. Meanwhile, from his suitcase Lake brought out a compact little ultraviolet lamp with a black glass filter. He plugged it in and waited for it to warm up.

"If these are natural stones they'll fluoresce irregularly," he said. "Some will glow brightly, some dimly. And in different colors: mostly blue, some yellow, and a few green."

Warwick switched off the lights and the onlookers waited in the shadowed room.

Tim Lake put the open box into the lamp's rays and uttered an exclamation of surprise. The compact array of gems gave off a vivid orange glow which colored the gloom. They were a beautiful sight, all evenly bright and evenly orange.

"I shall want to make further tests in the laboratory but this quite convinces me," said Lake, holding the glowing box of stones and looking like a sorcerer. "No parcel of natural stones in the world ever fluoresced all this color. And look at the uniform brightness—all exactly alike."

Mercer moved suddenly, and Warwick and Norton jumped to intercept him. The ex-jeweler thrust his left hand into the ultraviolet rays. There was a solitaire diamond on the middle finger, a good stone about a half carat in weight. As if to emphasize the difference between synthetic gem and true stone, the diamond glowed with a bright, sky-blue fluorescence.

After the examination of the diamonds Warwick telephoned Mercer's hotel room. "Found anything?" he demanded.

"Believe it or not, sir," answered the sergeant in charge. "Hunziger's prints are here."

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"Splendid," said the Special Branch man. Obviously his prisoner had seen and conversed with Hunziger.

He rang up Tempest's flat. "Any sign of a motive yet?" he asked.

"Never a one," was the reply.

"You haven't found any diamonds, by any chance?"

Knowing Hunziger's record the man at the other end was not surprised by the question. "We've found half a dozen dull bits of stuff which *might* be uncut diamonds," he said doubtfully.

"What! You have?" Warwick shouted. "Send them over here!"

Fifteen minutes later a detective arrived with the uncut stones and Tim Lake looked at them. They had the greasy feel and the frosted look of genuine "rough," but they were synthetic. The tests left no doubt of it.

"Another link between Mercer, Tempest, and Hunziger," Warwick said jubilantly. "This job is going like a dream. We'll catch that slippery devil and hang him."

In that mood of savage geniality he turned to his prisoner. With murder as the next item on the agenda, the ex-jeweler was in some haste to establish an alibi. He admitted that the dollars-for-diamonds deal had been consummated in his hotel room between nine and ten o'clock the previous night. Afterward, from ten to midnight, he had been steadily drinking scotch and soda in the hotel bar, and then had gone straight up to bed. The waiter, the porter, and the upstairs maid could back up his story, he said.

"That has to be verified," said Warwick. "You're not in the clear. It *was* Hunziger brought you the diamonds and took off with the dollars—wasn't it?"

"I never knew the guy's name," said Mercer.

"What was he like?"

"I didn't notice."

"About what age was he?"

"I can't remember."

"Look here," said Warwick in exasperation. "That man has swindled you and involved you in a murder. You could still be an accessory. And don't forget, if you get ten or fifteen years in this country you'll serve your sentence. Cold cells at Dartmoor and killing work in the quarries. No talking, no smoking, and damned little to eat. It's horrible, man!"

Mercer was shaken by this not quite truthful picture of penal servitude but he didn't break down. "I'm not talking," he said.

"You're helping Hunziger to get away. He'll take a cool million abroad. He'll be having a lovely time with the girls while you're looking through the bars and longing for a smoke."

"I'm not talking," said Mercer.

"I can't understand you," said Warwick. "This man has done you down. You've nothing to be afraid of. He has no mob behind him.

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He's a lone wolf, and when we catch him he'll swing. There's no reason for you to keep your mouth shut."

"I never blabbed to the cops," said Mercer, "and I never will."

So it went on. While the renewed hue and cry for Hunziger gathered momentum, Warwick sweated Mercer for hours. But the prisoner would give no information. At last the Scotland Yard man gave up, temporarily. He took Norton out to a pub.

"I'm afraid I was overconfident," he admitted, as they sat at a bar, eating turkey sandwiches and drinking ale. "The job was going too fast and now it's broken down. I don't know what the devil to make of Mercer. Why won't he talk?"

"Tradition," Norton said solemnly.

"The obstinate blighter," said Warwick. "I'd like to bang his head against a wall."

"Why not? Why don't you get rough with him?"

"He's an American citizen. I don't want a consular inquiry about rough treatment. . . . I wish I could get a clear picture of Tempest's connection with the job," Warwick went on uneasily. "It sounds slightly incredible, but it looks as if he were the man who made those fake diamonds. After all, *somebody* made them. But why did he have dealings with a fellow like Hunziger? It looks as if Hunziger had been entrusted with the diamonds to sell. He sold them, then went back and gave Tempest the chop. Why in heaven did he do that? He was in possession of a million dollars and all that he had to do was disappear."

"He went back to get the diamond-making process, and then he killed Tempest to keep him quiet," said Norton. "That epitomizes a whole pattern of existence. A man uses his patience, capital, and knowledge in making a great discovery. Then some crook not fit to walk within a hundred miles of him comes along and takes everything. That's what always happens when thieves come in contact with creative men. It burns me to see them getting away with it."

"Hold on a minute," said Warwick. "If Tempest was accessory to the sale of four hundred homemade diamonds for a million dollars he was a bit of a thief himself."

"No," Norton replied. "That doesn't sound like Tempest at all." He tapped an evening newspaper which lay on the bar. "I've been reading his obituary. He must have been a fine man. In his lifetime he passed up a lot of chances to make himself rich. He wouldn't join in a swindle."

"Suppose he'd used up all his capital? You can put that in your pattern of existence—what many a good man has to do for the sake of the ready."

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"That wouldn't make Tempest turn crooked. I'm sure of it."

"You think Tempest was kidded along, swindled, robbed of his secret and murdered?"

"That's what I think, Norton said grimly.

There was a thoughtful silence; then Warwick said, "The only thing we can do is keep on trying to soften up Mercer. Let's go and have another session with him."

As the day drew to its close the search for Hunziger required more and more men. The word was out to all districts, from Dover to Holyhead and from Plymouth to Aberdeen. The newspapers had the story too. They did not know that the great sum in dollars was stolen money, but it was still a perfect story. *MILLION DOLLAR FUGITIVE,* the headlines shouted.

Throughout the rest of the day and night thousands of men were questioned and dozens arrested and released, but Hunziger was not seen. There were many reports from civilian sources, but not one of them led the police to the wanted man. Several crackpots gave themselves up at police stations, to be kicked out by irritable detectives when it was found that they were not and could not have been Hunziger.

"I'm scared," Warwick admitted. "I'm afraid he scampered before you even arrived in town. We're making no progress. Midnight, and we haven't even found Tempest's laboratory. I hope Tim Lake was right about those stones. He's good, but I'd have felt safer with Grafton Devine. With him we'd be certain."

Still, whether or not he had made the diamonds, Tempest had not been the sort of man to be idle. He would have had a laboratory somewhere. Every routine means had been used to find his name in connection with premises away from his home, and now it was feared that he had operated his laboratory under a false name or a company name. But the labor of seeking, telephoning, and questioning went on as the minutes and hours marched away.

It was four o'clock in the morning, when the first information came in. It was from an unexpected quarter. A constable on night duty out at Potter's Bar had been gossiping with the watchman of a brickyard. The watchman had also been a truck driver for the same firm. He had seen Tempest's picture in the *Evening Standard,* and he was quite sure that he had delivered several loads of high-grade firebricks to him at a place in Rotherhithe about three years before.

The constable called up the manager of the brickyard, who referred him to the firm's London traveler. The traveler said, "Rotherhithe. I remember. It was a single order. Afterward I called regularly for a

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time, but the place was always locked up. The address is the Old Brewery, Tobago Lane."

Warwick and Norton were still at Scotland Yard when the news was transmitted to the Information Room.

"Rotherhithe," said Warwick. "Let's go."

He drove across Westminster Bridge toward southeast London. The car made good time along the empty streets.

In Jamaica Road they met an elderly sergeant of M Division. "You can't mistake it," he said. "It stands by itself in the middle of bombed-out ground. Turn left at Lower Road."

They found Tobago Lane within sight of the cranes, masts, and funnels of the Surrey Commercial Docks. The Lane itself was a stretch of cobbles across ground which had once been covered with warehouses. But the Old Brewery had been spared. In the middle of the cleared ground it stood alone, an L-shaped building with a stubby, square chimney stack.

They left the car and approached on foot. Looking around, they found that the place was locked up, as the traveler in bricks had found it so many times.

"There's a window here might do." Warwick took out his penknife.

He slipped the catch and opened the window. They climbed through into a dusty storeroom. From there they walked into a long laboratory furnished with benches and ovenlike metallurgical furnaces. Those small furnaces could not possibly have raised the almost atomic heat which would be necessary to make diamonds. There would have to be something bigger. The two men moved along, looking for it. They stepped quietly on the stone floor.

At the end of the room there was a small office and opposite to it was a big alcove. Most of the alcove was occupied by empty oil drums which were piled precariously almost to the ceiling, but in a small cleared-off space a huge flagstone had been tilted by some mechanism so that it gave access to a cellar. The investigators stopped when they saw it.

"Our man's been here," Warwick whispered.

"Correct. Don't move," said someone behind them. "Now put your hands up."

They stood still while they were deftly searched. Then the voice said, "All right. Turn around."

They turned and saw a man of medium height, ordinary in appearance. But the eyes in his dark, sardonic face were not ordinary. They were so black that iris and pupil seemed to glow with the same flat, disturbing intensity.

The man held a Luger pistol in his right hand and there was a suitcase on the floor at his left. Obviously he had been hiding behind one of the furnaces.

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Because he knew the man, Warwick was less apprehensive than he ought to have been. "Devine!" he exclaimed. "How do you come into this? I thought—" He stopped, then said, "No wonder you weren't in your office yesterday. You were busy! *You're Hunziger!*"

"To my friends," he said coolly.

"How nice for you! Grafton Devine, the diamond expert, moving freely among the big stuff, picking your jobs. Ye gods, the police have been slow!"

"On the contrary, I should congratulate you," said Hunziger. "I didn't think you would find this place so soon."

Norton was looking at the suitcase. "The plunder, huh?" he said. "Have you got it all?"

"Of course. But—an American? Why are *you* here?"

"Looking for the money you've got there."

"So it was stolen money. I wondered about that. No matter. It can be changed easily enough in France."

"How long have you been here?" asked Warwick.

"I'll answer that one too. In fact, it's a pleasant change to talk to somebody. I've been here eighteen hours, culling information from Tempest's files. I've got all I want, except details of the actual plant. I must see that. Unfortunately I had to move a lot of filthy oil drums to find the cellar entrance. I'd just got it open when you arrived."

"How did you get in with Tempest?"

"My dear Warwick, you forget my reputation. Even Scotland Yard consults me. Tempest came to me in strictest confidence and asked me how to go about the business of selling synthetic diamonds. *Very* interesting! I told him to keep quiet while I looked around for a market. The rest was easy."

"Ralph Mercer was your market," said Norton. "How much did Tempest want for his diamonds?"

"He was delighted with an imaginary offer of sixty thousand dollars for the four hundred stones he had ready," Hunziger replied. "He entrusted them to me without a murmur."

"And you sold them for a million and murdered the poor guy to get his secret," Norton said contemptuously.

The cold voice cut Hunziger's complacency like a whiplash. His dark glance appraised Norton as he felt the other man's enmity. His response in the circumstances was typical: a mocking smile. "Yes," he said. "Apparently you know it all, but you won't live to talk about it. Now I want to see what is downstairs. Go on down those steps. Turn on those lights. And remember, don't try anything. I'm a practiced hand with a pistol."

They walked down stairs fitted with rubber mats.

The cellar had two floors, each

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as large as the room above, but for two-thirds of their area they were packed to the ceiling with earth and rubble. This obviously had been taken from a wide semicircular shaft which had been sunk a good thirty feet down beyond the lower floor. Rising from the shaft was a tapering tower of yellow firebrick. It leaned slightly and where it joined the cellar wall below the square chimney there were round white doors like staring eyes. From the lower floor, thick asbestos-covered pipes snaked down to its base.

"That's a furnace," said Hunziger. "The narrowest, hottest furnace you'll ever see. I expected something like this. It is nothing less than an artificial volcanic pipe. Unprecedented heat in a confined space. Tempest has reproduced the conditions under which nature made diamonds."

There was a deep humming sound and the floor of the cellar began to vibrate. "What's that?" Hunziger snapped, alert and vicious. He was a changed man. His pistol became an active menace.

Someone answered him calmly, but in a voice of thunder. "You have less than ten minutes to get out of here."

"That's Frederick Tempest!" Warwick gasped.

The voice went on, "This is the only sure way of protecting my secrets. When you walked down the stairs you stepped on a switch. In ten minutes, which is the length of this record, the place will be on fire from end to end. The fans are driving vaporized fuel into the cold furnace. It will ignite at a certain pressure and burn explosively enough to burst the furnace. Get out now, while you have the chance."

The voice stopped and there was no sound but the humming of the powerful fans. They seemed to shake the whole building.

The listeners had instinctively edged nearer to the cellar steps. Hunziger was at the foot, while his captives stood apart, five yards away from him. He was smiling again. The others could almost read his thoughts. This would be a sweet cremation job. It was just a pity he hadn't been able to examine the furnace.

Warwick and Norton stood helpless, white-faced as they looked at death. They were brave men and all they asked was a fighting chance; but they were also human, and death was unwelcome. Norton's glance showed his angry unwillingness to accept the final defeat from this smooth murderer.

The disembodied voice began again. "You have less than six minutes to get out . . ." And as Hunziger's gun shifted to point at Norton's heart, the fighting chance came.

There was a great crash overhead, then a confused bumping and rolling. Hunziger had been

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careless in piling the oil drums and the vibration of the fans had overbalanced a shaky stack. One stout drum came rolling and bounding down the cellar stairs.

Hunziger turned involuntarily, and hampered by the suitcase in his left hand, jumped to avoid the drum. In that instant his two enemies leaped into action and the simultaneous attack confused him. His pistol wavered before he fired. His bullet grazed Norton's head; then he went down, with both men on top of him. Warwick grabbed the gun while Norton got strong fingers inside Hunziger's collar and in an excess of fury banged his head hard on the stone floor.

Tempest's voice was still calmly announcing his warning. Warwick dragged and heaved the half-conscious Hunziger up the cellar steps and Norton followed with the suitcase. They did not stop until they were at a safe distance from the building.

It was a good explosion. There was a heavy rumbling sound, then the building appeared to have burst a blood vessel. The windows had a dull-red look and the walls seemed to swell. Then the windows flew out and soon the place was a roofless ruin from which solid, perpendicular flames roared skyward.

Warwick called the fire brigade and returned to stare ruefully at the blaze. "What a ruddy job this has turned out to be," he grumbled. "You tread on the mat and set the place alight. Let's go. We can't just stand here watching a fire."

At Bow Street, Mercer was roused and brought into the Charge Room to confront Hunziger. He immediately rushed at the man and struck him before he could be dragged away.

"I figure they've met before," said Norton dryly. "You could call that a sort of identification."

He opened the suitcase and removed two loose-leaf books. Beneath the books, flat bundles of brand-new hundred-dollar bills were neatly packed: sixteen bundles in a layer, six layers, and four bundles over. It was all there—one million dollars.

He checked numbers from a notebook and closely examined some of the bills. "This is it, for sure," he said.

Warwick grinned. "Now, let battle commence. The money belongs to the United States, but the British Treasury will object to a million dollars going out of the country if it wasn't declared when it was brought in."

"There'll be no trouble," said Norton. "It'll go to the Bank of England—to be repulped in the presence of the usual witnesses."

Hunziger was recovering. "Counterfeit!" he said bitterly.

"As crooked as you are," said Norton. "It was made by the Germans during the war, as an item of

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currency sabotage. But it was never issued and our troops found it after the war and sent it to Washington. Most of it was destroyed, but some sap in the Treasury thought he'd like to have a million dollars right there in his office. Well, somebody talked and it was stolen. My task was to recover it before it got into circulation."

Hunziger looked with hatred at Ralph Mercer.

"Don't blame him," said Norton with false sympathy. "He was the biggest sucker of all time. He never knew anything."

Mercer was not insulted. He no longer had to worry about having been swindled out of a million dollars. His reputation as an honest illegal trader in gems was intact.

Warwick drew Norton aside. "Why didn't you tell *me* it was snide money?" he asked reproachfully.

"Sorry, old man," was the reply. "My orders were to tell nobody till I'd got the stuff. Besides, you might have lost interest in it. You see, I had to get it at any cost."

The Scotland Yard man nodded to admit the wisdom of Norton's reticence. The sum of one million dollars had appealed to his imagination. But a gleam came into his eyes as he looked at Hunziger. "I've got him, anyway," he said.

The American agent went to the table and picked up the loose-leaf books. He glanced through them, letting the edges of the pages fall away from his thumb. He looked at the titles: *Carbon Treatment* and *Heat and Pressure*. Hunziger appeared to have been knowledgeable in his selection of material. Obviously the two books contained the summation of Tempest's years of research.

"The value of this'll be in industrial diamonds," said Norton. "The miners and engineers of the world need them. And our Mr. Hunziger preserved this knowledge for posterity. If he'd looked in the cellar before he made his notes, everything would have been destroyed. There's a certain irony in that—yes, sir, a certain irony. Poor Tempest is dead, but wherever he is I think he'll be satisfied with the outcome of this. His own arrangements helped to make sure that no crook got anything out of the deal."

The rasp came into his voice as he looked at the prisoners. "You hear that, you fools? You were licked from the start."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WES LUPIEN**

TITLE: ***The Best of Friends***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Southern United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Buford knew his place, but when his master left for the day, curiosity overwhelmed him . . . and there was no premonition of tragedy.*

BUFORD WAS VERY STILL AS HE watched Scroggins close the gate, get back into the old wagon, and take off down the gravel road, trailing a cloud of dust. From where he sat on the porch he watched the old man's wagon bounce and rattle along the rows of sweet corn, turn west, and disappear over the rise. Only the dust remained as evidence that someone had passed, then it slowly spread out over the fields and began to settle on the early morning dew.

Scroggins wouldn't be back until late in the afternoon and Buford knew that until then he was alone on the farm. A big, green fly landed on his head and he scratched at it lazily. While he tried to think of something interesting to do, he stretched his feet out on the porch and relaxed. He vaguely considered going out to look for rabbits, but it would soon be too hot for that. Then, as he was about to doze off, he noticed that the front door was ajar. Scroggins had forgotten to close it.

Buford could still remember when old Mose had brought him up from the colored settlement near Pointersville. He had been pretty young then, but he could still remember Mose telling him that Scroggins was going to be his new master, and to mind what the white man told him. He had taken a liking to his new boss right off, and except for one time when he had wandered into the front room with muddy feet, Scroggins had never been harsh with him.

That had been a day two weeks after his arrival, and it was raining cats and dogs. He had been having the time of his life out in the big yard, splashing about in the mud

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and trying to catch raindrops before they hit the ground, when he had heard the old man singing in the house and had decided to go investigate—meanwhile forgetting all about the mud.

He remembered sneaking into the kitchen and peeking around the corner to see what was going on. Scroggins was sitting at the window singing, and picking at an old guitar which he had strapped around his neck. Suddenly Scroggins had seen him and put the instrument down quickly.

"Get your carcass out of this house, you black devil," he had shouted, "I don't want your dirt in here. You ain't fit to live with white folks."

The words had hurt Buford deeply, and he had sulked on the porch for the rest of the day. Towards evening, when it began to turn cool, Scroggins had called him into the kitchen to get something to eat. They both felt better then.

The kitchen was Buford's domain and as long as he didn't venture into the rest of the house he and Scroggins remained the best of friends. Still, he couldn't help but feel just a little curious about the other rooms. Sometimes after supper, while Scroggins sat by the fire in the front room reading, Buford would peek into the forbidden land from behind the kitchen door.

There were several odd-looking pieces of ancient furniture—they smelled musty and their faded colors gave them a look of uniformity. In the middle of the floor lay a thick fur rug, a remnant of some deceased monster, which he would eye suspiciously, expecting any minute that it would jump up and come after him. On the mantel over the fireplace was an old clock with a pendulum that swung back and forth—tick, tock, tick, tock. He had never seen a clock before and only his fear of punishment kept him from sneaking closer to view the mysterious box.

Now, as he saw the door which Scroggins had forgotten to latch, his curiosity got the best of him and very slowly he crept across the porch, his eyes scanning the road cautiously, and pushed his head through the crack.

He didn't realize how quiet it could be as he stole through the empty room, his gaze fastened on the clock. He paused below, unable to reach it, and his head moved back and forth to the rhythm. Pretty soon he became dizzy, sat down, and shook his head. He decided that the clock wasn't so interesting after all, and he looked around. Seeing the rug he forgot the clock completely. He walked around it several times guardedly, then jumped and landed right in the middle. The thick fur tickled his feet, and he reached down and pulled out a big chunk, almost expecting some reaction—but there was none.

Then he saw another door which

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he had never noticed before and he went over and looked in. There was a bed in the middle of the room that seemed almost too big for the house. The covers were pulled back and the sheets hung limply to the floor, where shoes and slippers lay scattered about like brown and black chickens in the yard. Buford wondered how it would feel to sleep in a big soft bed like this, but he knew he didn't dare touch anything. He walked around the bed and looked into the closet. An old lantern stood on the top shelf and many pieces of well-worn clothing hung from little hooks along the back wall.

Suddenly his body went rigid and he felt as if his heart would stop beating—he had heard a sound in the other room, the sound of someone stepping on a loose board. The fear that clutched him was unimaginable, he didn't dare be found in here. What could he do? Then as he stood there, a strange thought came to him: this couldn't be Scroggins—he wouldn't be home till evening. Besides, he had heard no wagon outside. Who was it?

Scared as he was, Buford knew he had to find out who was in the other room. It took every ounce of strength in his body to get his legs to move, but he slowly made his way to the door and peeked around the corner. There, at the table, his back to the door, stood a ragged-looking man in an old jacket. On the table before him stood the clock, the front of it opened and its pendulum motionless. The man was opening a black purse from which he withdrew a sheaf of green bills and began to count them.

Buford quickly forgot his fears, for he knew that he had to act at once. With a running leap he flew at the man, hitting him from behind, and they both went sprawling on the floor. The man rolled over, and when he saw Buford his frightened expression turned to one of amusement. Before Buford could regain his feet the man began shooting and the whole house vibrated to the noise. His gun empty, the man shoved the bills into his pocket and ran out through the kitchen.

It was almost evening when Scroggins returned. He stopped for a few minutes at the barn where he unloaded some feed bags and then drove up to the house, halted, the wagon, and started up the yard with a big bag of groceries under his arm. As he mounted the steps to the porch he saw the open door and stopped. Slowly he put down the sack and walked over to the entrance, his alert eyes scanning the front room.

With a stifled cry he rushed into the room—then stood frozen. The table lay on its side. The clock, twisted and silent, lay surrounded by broken glass which was half hid-

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den by a large reddish-brown stain that had begun to dry. And there, in the middle of the fur rug, lay Buford, his bullet-ridden body stiff and cold.

He stood there for almost a full minute, as if unable to understand.

Then his expression changed as sadness washed away his first reaction of surprise.

The tears rolled crookedly down his parched, wrinkled face and for the first time in his life Scroggins felt old and helpless. He pulled a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. Then he rolled the lifeless form up into the rug on which it lay, lifted it slowly in his arms, and carried the old, black dog out to the barn.

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THE MAN WHO FIGURED EVERYTHING

by THEODORE STURGEON and DON WARD

THIS IS ABOUT JIM CONLIN, THE Badlands Bookkeeper. He was, according to the journals of the time, a terror, a menace, and a scourge. He was, in the flesh, a mild man, young and balding early, with diffident horizontal lines across his brow.

He hid in the hills with his half-dozen riders, all but one of whom outweighed him, but then that one was only a three-quarter breed Nez Perce, and hardly counted. These men, each to his taste, fought and gambled, drank and wenched, always providing they had Jim Conlin's advance permission and pursued the hobby somewhere away from Jim Conlin's hideout. A long way away. There was a town, Dead Mole Spring, eight miles away as the crow flies, where nobody had ever seen Conlin or any of his crew —a good example of the way the Bookkeeper of the Badlands arranged things.

Jim Conlin figured. He figured everything, the Bookkeeper did. He never moved until he was ready, and when he was ready, it was altogether. In some sleepy mountain town, just when the marshal was out and the sheriff drunk, and the bank heavy with cowpokes' pay and prospectors' dust, Jim Conlin's men would whirl up out of the ground like dust-devils and be gone like smoke, the gold with them.

The only similarity between one job and another was that element of perfect planning, perfect timing —the only clue, most of the time, as to who the robbers were. Unless, of course, Conlin wanted it otherwise, like the time he took the Rocky Summit Bank three times in one week, just because everybody was so positive he wouldn't be back.

He would have been caught for sure the time rumors got around that he was going to rob the express between Elwood and Casson's Quarry; the train was loaded with law and the tracks lined on both sides with one of the biggest posses the West had ever seen, which was

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fine with Conlin, who was busy at the time robbing another train on another railroad.

He would certainly be remembered in large type, like Butch Cassidy and the James boys, if it were not for his concentration on fine detail—this got him only into fine print. As a man, he was colorless to the point of invisibility; as a desperado he was too methodical to be remembered. Probably the largest two reasons his reputation has faded with the newspapers of his day were these: he never killed a lawman, and he was never caught.

There came one night to Jim Conlin's hideout, Arch Scott, invited and escorted. Scott had something of a reputation locally—cautious, sober, with special skills in safes and lockboxes. He could use a gun, and didn't, which was a high recommendation to the Bookkeeper; and Scott's ability to do nine consecutive jobs with the methods of nine different people clinched it.

Although the Bookkeeper occasionally took on a brace or two of drifters for special jobs, letting them go afterwards, he liked to keep a half-dozen regulars with him; and there was a vacancy just now, one Farley Moore having succumbed to romance. (That was Conlin's name for it; actually it was tetanus, contracted after a Rocky Summit housewife, mistaken for a doxie by Moore, removed his ear with an iron skillet.)

So Conlin gave Arch Scott his guided tour and his most careful examination, introducing him around, watching him, making his estimate. He liked Scott—liked him, that is, the way a man likes a well made saddle or a clean rifle. The Bookkeeper had human feelings, but he had a place for them, and he kept them all there. Which introduces Loretta Harper.

She was the only woman permitted at the hideout, except for a few squaws who washed clothes and swept out. Conlin had found her working in a place she was glad to get out of—especially with a man who knew enough about her to ask no questions and saw to it that she got more of the things she liked than she could hope for working in town. He had something for all her hungers but one, and that one was beyond his comprehension. It was beyond hers, too, until Arch Scott came.

"This here's Loretta," Conlin said when he brought Scott in, and Scott saw a carving come to life, silk and ivory and ice, as out of place here as a leaf from *Godey's* tacked to a haybarn; and Loretta saw a neat man with heavy shoulders and good teeth and eyes you couldn't keep secrets from.

And that should have been that. It would have been, as far as Arch was concerned. He was there on business, and business came first. And Loretta felt nothing, just then. Jim Conlin's men came and went and his steady crew was always

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there. This was another one, only another one. As Conlin and Scott left she turned back to her mirror, and if anyone had asked her, she probably wouldn't have remembered the new man's name.

Conlin and Arch Scott went down the mountain for fifty yards or so to the cabin and went in. "Henry Little Hawk," said Conlin, nodding at the slight figure squatting by the door.

"Howdy," said Scott. "I'm—

"Yuh," grunted the little man. He looked like an animated piece of mahogany, and seemed to be composed mainly of eyebrows, nose, and sharp shinbones.

Conlin chuckled. "He knows who you are. He's the one found you for me. Or anyway, he's the one who found out it was really you who did the jobs you say you done. He sees everything and everybody, Henry does, and nobody sees him." He went to the back wall of the cabin and put his boot on it. It swung aside. "Havin' Henry around's like having your eyes out on stalks forty mile long," he said, motioning Scott through the opening, then closing it. "Only a misfit Nez Perce breed, but God what a memory! Look at a town he never saw before, ride all night, draw you a map so fine you could go there and jump over a yaller dog blindfold."

They were standing at one end of a section of mine tunnel, with the wooden cabin wall behind them and a rockfall at the other end. The long room was fitted out like a bunkhouse, but with a fire in the center, its smoke curling upward to be lost in a fissure overhead. All evidence of the old mine workings had been carefully removed from the outside and the weather-beaten cabin, scarcely large enough for two men, substituted. Any posse-man willing to believe the evidence of his own eyes would call you a liar if you told him you had seen a bunch the size of Conlin's disappear into this hillside. Not that a posse had ever been within miles of this place, of course.

"Can sleep eleven here in a pinch," Conlin said. "Ain't but four now—Henry, he don't bunk here. Suit you?"

Scott swept the place with a glance. "Fine, Conlin. I slept in worse and paid money for it. Where's the—"

He was interrupted by a blast of language, English and Spanish, profane and obscene, packed tight as grapeshot and twice as loud. A tall man, hidden until now by the end bunks, sprang to his feet, snatching a coiled bull-whip from a peg on the rock wall. He was a blaze of color and fancy-work, Mexican weaving and tooled leather. On his shoulder blades, held by an elaborately braided thong, perched a hand-blocked silken felt worth six months of a cowpoke's pay.

He shook out the whip and brought it whistling back, and in that split second Conlin was behind

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him, grasping the lash. The whip flicked out of the man's hand and Scott, still standing by the wooden wall, had to step aside to avoid the loaded handle.

"Now Al, you know better'n that," said Conlin quietly. He drew up beside the bunks and looked down. A blanket was spread on the floor, and on it was gold money and a deck of cards. A second giant knelt by the blanket, scowling. His eyes were red, very small, very wide apart, and at the moment full of kill. Conlin's appearance had arrested him halfway to his feet with a nickel-plated .45 halfway out. He came to his feet now, but slowly, and when he stopped moving, his gun was holstered and his hand clear of it.

The man with the fancy hat, Al, began to splutter at Conlin, something about wart-hogs, something about an inside straight, something in Spanish. Conlin shook his head gently, stooped, and picked up most of the cards. Deftly he stacked them, cut them, and tore the pack in two, letting the pieces flutter to the ground.

The two big men watched the pieces fall. The red-eyed man bit his lower lip silently with square yellow teeth. The other one ran out of splutter and simply stood there, breathing hard. If Arch Scott expected anything else to happen, he was disappointed. Conlin motioned to him and said, "Scott, this here's Big Ike Friend." The red-eyed man glowered at the stranger. "And Al Coe."

"Arch Scott. Howdy."

"Howdy," Coe grunted. He walked past the others and went for his whip. He came back, coiling it as he walked, not looking at anybody, and hung it on the peg. "Seen you before, Scott," he said with his back turned.

"Don't think so."

"Ever down Taos way, or 'Dobe?"

"I come from the Dakotas," said Arch Scott quietly, "where folks don't ask questions."

Big Ike Friend produced a harsh, brief snicker from the depths of his flat nose.

"Tell you something," said Conlin in a voice so mild in the sudden tension that Scott nearly jumped with shock. "We don't fight among ourselves here. Anybody wants to rassle, go pick on a stranger some place else. You ain't learned that, Scott, and you and Big Ike forgot it, I guess, Al. We don't gamble here, we don't drink—not enough to get drunk on, anyways—and there ain't no women allowed. I got nothing against them three things, but they're the three best reasons for fightin', and that kind of fightin' is one thing I ain't got time to keep books on. Scott, you need anything, you ask Big Ike or Al Coe here. I'm going back to the house."

And he did, without so much as a good night, leaving all the makings of a three-sided donnybrook. But

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then Arch Scott laughed—not at the two big men, but in an indefinable way with them, so that he was no longer a stranger, but part of a crew which had just seen a hundred and forty pounds of mild logic putting out a fire. Big Ike laughed too; Al Coe did not, but he relaxed visibly.

"Where do I bunk?" Scott asked.

Big Ike pointed out the empties. Scott selected one and sat down on it, looking quizzically at the others. "How does he do it?"

"By bein' right," said Al Coe reluctantly.

"Lots of hombres go around being right, nobody listens," said Big Ike.

"Those are the guys that don't pay off," said Coe. "Bein' right is nothin' by itself."

And there it was, in as neat a nutshell as anyone could pack it. There's no point in disagreeing with a man who's always right, who also puts money in your sock.

Arch Scott fell asleep that night knowing he wouldn't be bothered.

The horses were corraled in a narrow dry gulch a quarter of a mile away, visible from two places—inside, and straight up. Like the rest of this spread, it was only another scar on the hillside.

Conlin went down there in the morning with Loretta, to cut out a gentle horse for her. It was early, but Arch Scott was already up and about, standing just inside the narrow throat of the gulch, his hands in the back pockets of his levis and his hat on the back of his head. "Morning."

Conlin nodded to him. Loretta didn't say anything. Scott glanced at her, then took his hands out of his pockets and removed his hat. His tardiness was understandable. When Loretta rode, the carven goddess was folded up and put away. She wore levis and a shirt and a soft leather vest, and her bright hair was hidden under a wide-brimmed man's hat; and from twenty paces she looked like a country boy out to bark squirrels, which was the idea.

She stood by the rails near Scott and waited while Conlin went in with a bridle over his shoulder and a rope on one arm. Scott glanced at her once, but she seemed to be watching Conlin, so he said nothing. He watched Conlin too, and he liked what he saw.

The Bookkeeper did what he had to do without waste motion, and better than anyone he might have ordered to do it for him. He took a roan gelding on the first cast, reeled him in, and had the rope off and the bridle on in what looked like one movement. He led the animal to a shed by the rocky wall of the cut and went in for a saddle.

"Scott."

Arch looked at the woman. She had not moved, and was certainly not looking his way. Her voice had been just loud enough to reach him. He sensed that this was no casual approach to a casual conversation,

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so he took her cue and stayed where he was. "Ma'm?"

"Waterhole called Green Spring," she said, hardly moving her lips. In spite of its softness she had a surprisingly full voice. "Find it. Be there at two o'clock." Before he could answer or acknowledge, she had slipped through the rails and was walking toward Conlin.

He watched her mount and wheel the horse. He gathered his wits and dropped the bars for her as she rode out. She passed as if he did not exist. Scott replaced the bars without looking after her.

"We're going out on a little job today," Conlin told him when he came up.

"We are?"

"*We* are—Henry and me and Al and Big Ike. Moko and Gus, that's the two you ain't met yet, they're waiting for us."

"I do something wrong?"

Conlin seemed to think the question quite natural. "Hardly had a chance yet, have you?"

"What do you want me to do while you're out?"

Conlin swept out his arm in a wide circular motion. "Smell out this spread. I want you to memorize every rock and bush and cut and hogback within ten miles of here. They say a couple big glaciers carved up this country, Scott—I wouldn't know about that myself; but whoever done it was working for us. You'll see. You'll find out that this country can lose a Injun tracker with a pack o' hounds, if you know where to go. Nobody ever trailed us in here, and nobody's about to, because every man of us comes and goes a different way and knows a hundred more. You got to get to know this country like the inside of your front teeth."

"All right," Scott said.

Conlin laughed at his expression. "Don't get yourself so damn disappointed, Scott. You're about to make the easiest money you'll ever make with us. You get a half share of everything we make, just for stayin' here. The other boys get one share each. I get two and a half. Your pay is free and clear. I got all the expenses. Understand?"

"Sounds fine to me."

"Long as you understand, there ain't nothin' to argue about, with me or anybody. You want to know anything, don't wonder and don't start rumors. Ask."

"All right," said Scott. He wet his lips. "Where you going today?"

Conlin laughed again. "He wants to know where we're goin', Henry."

From midair, apparently, came an amused grunt. Scott whirled and looked right, looked left, then looked up. Henry Little Hawk squatted on a rock ledge ten feet off the ground, toasting his sharp nose and his sharper shinbones in the morning sun. "God!" said Scott. "I never saw him up there."

"I told you before. Henry goes everywhere, nobody ever sees him."

Scott looked again at the little

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breed, who was slowly coming to life, crabbing sidewise down the bluff. Had he heard Loretta speak to him? And if so—what? Was this her hard luck, or Scott's, or Conlin's? Or maybe it didn't matter. Henry Little Hawk wouldn't be around at two this afternoon anyway.

Scott wrenched his mind away from these thoughts and said, "So where you say you're going?"

Again that amused syllable from Henry Little Hawk. Conlin said, "Tell you what, you ask Big Ike." He turned away and went back to the saddle shed. Scott watched him rope another horse and then went slowly back to the hidden bunkhouse. Al Coe was sitting at a deal table with the guts of one of his pearl-handled .45s spread out on a clean white cloth. For all his fancy-work, this man knew his weapons and treated them right. "Big Ike around?"

"Down to the corral," said Coe. "I was just there."

Coe shrugged.

"Going to use those today," said Scott about the guns. It was the kind of statement that is a question.

Coe shrugged again and went on working.

Scott said suddenly, "Do I bother you?"

Coe seemed not to hear at all; and then Scott noticed his hands had stopped moving. He sat like that for a long moment, then slowly turned a pair of frozen eyes to take in the newcomer, from his hat to his hands, his holster, the plain strong boot on a bench, the knee on which Scott's crossed forearms rested. In a long, easy half whisper Al Coe said "No-o-o . . ." Scott might have said it the same way if someone had asked him if he was afraid of mice.

Scott smiled and said, "Too bad." He straightened up and went out, not hurrying. He knew that something had started that would have to be finished, and he regretted it; there were plenty of other things to worry him. Being liked or disliked by a jaybird like Al Coe didn't matter; just *why*, though, might matter very much. One possible reason might matter so much that Arch Scott would wind up dead.

Outside he watched a squaw, a misplaced Pueblo, laboring up the hill toward him from the ramshackle cookhouse, carrying two buckets of what had to be hot breakfast. From the direction of the corral he saw Big Ike swinging along the hillside. Scott let the squaw go on inside and stood where he was, though his stomach wanted to follow her; he was hungry and those buckets smelled good. "Mornin'," he said to the big man when he came up.

Big Ike nodded. Scott said, "Was down to the corral a while back, talked to Conlin."

"Talked to Conlin, did you?"

"Said you were ridin' out today."

"Said that, did he?"

"Asked him where to, he said you'd tell me."

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"No, he didn't," said Big Ike. He would have gone on inside, but Scott caught his elbow. Big Ike stopped, freed his arm, and slowly wiped it with his other hand, as if Scott had left mud on it.

Scott said, "You don't want to tell me, Ike, say so."

Big Ike looked surprised. "Hell," he said placatingly, "don't go jumping salty. I wasn't there, but I bet a empty ca'tridge to a dollar that Conlin didn't say no such a thing." As Scott's eyes narrowed he delivered up a surprising, jovial grin and held up both his hands. "Tell you why. Ain't none of us knows where we're goin' till we git there. Conlin, he always works like that."

"So why the hell didn't he say so?"

"You know as much about that as I do. He had a reason—he figures everything. Maybe he just wanted you to remember this special."

"The son!" said Scott, rueful and admiring.

"Yeah, he got his ways o' doin' things," chuckled Big Ike. "Now, what was it he reely said?"

"You're right," said Scott. "All he said was, if I want to know where you're ridin' today, ask Big Ike. He didn't say you'd tell me."

"He didn't even say I knew. Come on in and eat. You get a little tetchy when you're hongry, I can see that."

They went in to the buckwheat cakes and muscular black coffee the squaw had laid out. Al Coe had nothing to say to him.

Everybody but Arch Scott rode out at about nine o'clock. They rode east, but in these hills that could mean anything. Scott wished he knew where they were going.

At noon he was picking his way up a creek, crossing and recrossing and letting one of Conlin's sure-footed mountain ponies find the route. The Green Spring, he had been told, was the source of this particular stream. He had been told this by the Puebla, who answered his question in Spanish. He had pretended not to understand her; he didn't want anyone to add his knowledge of Spanish to Al Coe's guess—if it was a guess—about Taos. So she had answered in English and he was now on his way. To what he didn't know, but he had shaved first.

He had to leave the creek at an alder thicket and cut out to open ground. He was well up into the hills now, and could see the rolling country for miles. Ahead of him, a steep slope was capped by a rocky cliff, mostly sheer, in some places overhanging. "That spring better be under that cliff," he muttered. "Sure won't get over it without wings."

He moved back to the stream when he could, and found it boiling along, large as ever. Well, maybe it ran along the base of the cliff . . .

But it didn't. He swore helplessly when he saw how it gushed right out of the rock face and came brawling down the broken slope,

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with no sign of a spring at all, let alone a green one.

Who was playing games? Loretta? The squaw?

Jokers like to watch their victims. He looked around carefully, angrily. As far as the eye could determine, he had this cliff and this creek to himself, and the whole world to boot.

He looked again at the cliff. Forty, fifty, some places sixty feet. Sharp, almost solid rock, with a few scrubs of jack pine clinging to cracks here and there, and spruce and hemlock at the foot. Up at the top, like as not, it would be flat earth soft as delta country—a giant terrace up to the mountain beyond.

Suddenly he saw an answer—the only possible way that the squaw could be right and Loretta not playing games. Not practical jokes, anyway.

He cast up and back along the face of the cliff until he located a possible break near the top—a long brown scar of spilled earth and the clinging evergreens thick around it. He rode to the foot of it, found shade for the pony, and started to climb a spruce which grew hard by the sheer wall. Near the treetop was a tangle of limbs, part from his tree, part from growth on the cliff. He thrashed his way across and began to crawl upward.

In twenty minutes he was winded and furious. He had been a fly, a mountain goat, a leapfrog, an inchworm. His fingernails were broken and there was dirt in his mouth and grit under his right eyelid. But the last fifteen feet or so were suddenly easy, with a dry wash he had not been able to see before, angling gently up to the right, and he got up it on his hands and knees, and at last reached level ground.

He didn't attempt to get to his feet at first, but stayed there on all fours with his head hanging, blowing like a foundered horse. When at last he raised his head, there was the spring, waiting for him.

It was not, strictly speaking, a spring. Here, too, water appeared out of a hillside. It ran only a hundred feet or so, then widened into a pool overhung by trees and thick bushes. The banks were shadowed and mossy, yet only a few feet away one could stand in the sun and look out over seventy miles of country. Uphill from the pool, the slope became steeper and ended in another, much more formidable cliff. The stream evidently was underground most of the way, and came stitching out just here, to make the pool and disappear again through some fissure in its bottom.

Scott pushed his way through the underbrush to the edge of the water and stood a while, thinking nothing in the world but that this was a mighty nice place to be. Then he scanned the banks and the whole terrace and hillside with a mountain man's instinctive caution; and, seeing nobody, he took off his sweaty shirt and undershirt and

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doused them in the spring. He spread them on a flat rock to dry in the sun, then washed his head and neck and drank a little. Then he lay down in the mossy shade with his back against a boulder where he could see the whole pool with one flick of the eyes, and settled himself to wait.

He was, he realized with pleasure, early; by the sun, it couldn't be much past one o'clock. From the back pocket of his levis he extracted a small leather-bound book, and began to read.

"I never read a book in my life."

For the second time that day a disembodied voice spoke to him. Along with the flash of astonishment, and just as strong, was a surge of irritation. He bounced up and crouched, his eyes everywhere. That all they do between jobs, he thought angrily, make a monkey out of a man?

Then he saw her, and the anger faded, leaving only amazement. She stood in the split trunk of an Engelmann spruce, her hatless head like a bright flower in the thick growth of mountain laurel which concealed the cleft. He crossed his big arms on his bare chest and said with an odd diffidence, "Beg pardon, ma'm; can't say I saw you there. Let me get my shirt."

She waded through the laurel and stepped out on the bank. "I've seen the like before," she said. "Don't put it on while it's wet. What were you readin'?"

"Cooper."

"What's a cooper?"

"It's a book called *Last of the Mohicans* by a man named Cooper."

"I never read a book in my life," she said again. She looked at the volume where it lay by the boulder, at Scott, at the book again. She seemed to be having a great deal of trouble getting used to the idea of a man reading a book. "What do you read books for?"

Now he laughed, and she flared up at him, "You laughing at me?"

"Lord, no, ma'm. It's just that nobody ever asked me that before." He looked at the still water for a moment, thinking. "Tell you what, suppose you had a friend, he knew a whole lot more than you do. He could tell you things about what people are like all over the world, the way they live, everything. And what folks were like a hundred years ago or even a thousand. He could tell you things that make your hair curl, lose you sleep, or things that make you laugh." He looked up at her swiftly, and away. "Or cry."

He kicked a pebble into the water and watched the sunlight break and break, and heal. "More than that. Suppose you had a friend there waiting for you anytime you wanted him, any place. He'd give you all he's got or any part of it, whenever you wanted it. And even more, you could shut him up if you didn't feel like listening. Or if he said something you like, you could get him to say it over a hundred times, and he'd never mind."

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He pointed at the book. "And all that you can put in your pocket." Suddenly he faced her. "Talk a heap, don't I?"

"Yes," she said. But there was no objection in the word.

They stood by the water, their eyes trapped. Scott, then Loretta, tugged at the bond and for a moment couldn't break it. Then they were laughing embarrassedly, and laughing again at their own laughter.

She sat down, and he went down beside her, close, but not too close. "How many books've you read?" she asked.

"Lord, I don't know."

"*I'd* know."

This time he did laugh at her. She looked up into his face without anger. They fell silent again, until he said, "Ma'm—"

"Don't call me that. Loretta's my name."

"Yes'm—Loretta. Thanks. Was going to say, I have two-three more books in my bunkroll, you like to read them." He waited a long time for her answer, but there was none. "What's the matter?"

"I guess," she said with difficulty, "I better not borrow a book."

He drew breath to ask her why not, but the strain in her voice warned him away. Something here . . . Conlin didn't like books, or didn't like her borrowing from the bunch . . . or maybe something which didn't concern Conlin at all. He could wait. It would come in time, if it was important. "Any time you change your mind," he said pleasantly.

She moved impatiently. "Don't you wonder why I asked you to come up here?"

He shook his head.

A series of expressions chased themselves across her smooth face —puzzlement, anger, amusement. "I don't know whether to get mad at you for that," she said.

"You shouldn't."

"All right, why did I tell you to meet me?"

"You wanted somebody to talk to," he said immediately.

She made an odd sound, a short, surprised "Hm!" from her nostrils. Reluctantly her eyes met his. "What do you mean?"

"What I said. Someone to *talk* to," he said carefully. "All the time the same faces saying the same things—Conlin talking business, Al Coe bragging, and in between times," he added shrewdly, "trying on fancy clothes that nobody ever sees you in. Day after day . . . and you just naturally got to talk to someone."

"You see a lot!" she blurted, in a voice that should have been banter but came out real.

"I say something wrong?"

She thought about it, honestly searching. Then, "No. You have a way of . . . I don't know. I don't know how to say it, I'm just a . . . what I mean, it's hard to have secrets from you."

Wisely he said nothing.

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"I'll tell you why I wouldn't borrow a book," she blurted. "You see, I don't read so good. If I tried to read one of your books I wouldn't know what the words meant, and you'd think I was ignorant, and that's why." She leaped to her feet.

"Sure you're ignorant," he said, and smiled up at her, watching her face pale and her nostrils arch. "You know what? I'm ignorant too. I can't run a printing press or play the vi'lin or tan a leather hide. You know things I don't know, you've been places I never heard of. Everybody's ignorant, Loretta, one way or another. Should I hold it against you, you never happened to read books?"

"I never heard a man talk like you do," she breathed. "I *never*."

He rose at last, and went and got the book. "Here."

She hesitated, then took it. He said, "About the words, I'll get you a dictionary any time Conlin works a town big enough to find one in. Meanwhile you can write 'em down, or mark them right in the book, and ask me. Eight times out of ten I won't know what they mean either, but that's all right; sooner or later the dictionary'll straighten us out."

He turned away from her; it was kindness not to look at her face just then. He went to the flat rock and shook out his shirt. It was light and warm from the sun, dry and clean. He put it on and went back to her. She stood where he had left her, holding the book against her belt-buckle with both hands. He said, "You didn't climb no cliff to get here."

"No, no, I didn't," she said absently. "Come on, I'll show you how to get back an easier way."

"I have a pony down—"

"Come on."

They walked southward along the ledge, away from the shadowed pool and across a baking hell of broken rock. The terraced ground narrowed and tilted downward as they rounded the face of the mountain. Just before it turned into a rough trail there was an overhang, and in the shade the roan was tethered.

Loretta swung up on it before Scott could put out a hand to help her, and they continued down the trail. He glanced up at her occasionally; she rode in silence, evidently wrestling with some internal problem. The precipice at their left, which was the one he had climbed, gradually became part of the side-hill, until at last it was fit for a two-legged animal to walk on. She reined in.

"You cut back here, angling down," she said. "You'll be under the bluff then. Just keep going till you get to your pony."

There seemed to be something else that needed saying, but neither could find words. He watched her until she vanished around the face of the mountain, then he watched where she had been. At length he sighed and turned back to find his pony and ride the creek-bed back to the hideout.

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A hand on his shoulder, and up he came out of a shining dream of the New Mexican sun glaring off a page of Fenimore Cooper; but it wasn't print, it was a picture of a face with clear skin, hungry with puzzlement. But the thing was gone before he could grasp it. Then the hand touched him again. "Scott!"

He opened his eyes. Someone bent over him. "It's me, Conlin. Come on."

Scott slid into his pants and followed the smaller man through the firelit gloom of the bunkhouse and the false-backed cabin. He wished he could see Conlin's face.

Conlin led the way to a spot on the trail a short way from the cabin. "This'll do," he grunted. "Siddown."

They sat on a rock in the shadows. Scott heard the faint scrape of Conlin's holster on the rock, and let himself yearn for his own Colt's.

"How'd you make out?" he asked.

Conlin ignored the question completely. "What did you do with yourself today?"

"Looked around."

"Where at?"

"Yonder."

"By yourself?"

"Mostly."

"All right," said Conlin, "I know you was with Loretta. I know why, too."

Scott remembered how quiet Conlin's voice was when something ugly was going on, like the time he'd walked into that poker game in the bunkhouse. He tried to remember if this quiet was different from Conlin's usual quiet, and he couldn't.

Conlin said, "It's all right. You passed."

"Passed?"

"Some men," said Conlin, "make it to the cliff and turn back. Some bull ahead the way you do and get to the spring. Some cast back and forth along the mountain until they find the easy way. Once one of 'em got lost doing that."

Scott listened, so utterly surprised that he ceased trying to make sense out of any of this.

"Those that get to the top are two kinds—the ones who make mistakes and the ones who don't. You didn't."

It seemed to be time for Scott to say something, so he asked, "You mean you set that up for me, all of it?"

"For you, for everybody. There's some hombres just got to make damn fools of theirselves first chance they get, and the time to find it out is soon."

"Seems to me . . ." But Scott was learning fast. This was Conlin's method, Conlin's business.

"Spit it out, Scott."

"None of my business, Jim."

"That's all right."

"All right then. Ain't you taking a long chance with Miss Loretta?"

Conlin laughed that quiet chuckle of his. "Not a par-tickle. First place, ninety-nine out of a hundred wouldn't chance tangling with me on the

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very first day here. Second place, Loretta can take care of herself. If she can't do it with the back of her hand, she'll do it with the derringer she carries. Third place, if anybody should move too fast or too rough for her, there's Henry Little Hawk on the second bluff, up over the spring, with a long bar'led Winchester and the damnedest eye I seen yet. I seen Henry split a bullet on a knife blade and put out two candles."

Half consciously Scott stroked his breast-bone, imagining it suddenly slammed out between his shoulder blades before he could so much as hear the shot. He said, "You figure everything. And I don't know as I like that much, Conlin. I got to tell you that."

"You don't have to like it," said Conlin. "You didn't have to come here and you don't have to stay." The Bookkeeper paused, then said, "Here."

A small, heavy cloth bag fell into Scott's slack hand. "All gold, four hundred dollars. Your half share for today."

Scott squeezed the bag and tossed it in his hand. Their shares—his and Conlin's—would come to $2400. The other shares—five if the breed got as much as the rest—brought it to $6400. He whistled.

"Sure you'll stay," said Conlin.

"Why not?"

Conlin chuckled. "Now, Scott, somethin' else. You might as well know right from the start that Loretta don't cotton to you much. You got too much book-learnin' and it scares her. But at the same time them books can be a godsend. She got a lot of time on her hands—I can't be keepin' her happy every single minute—and if you can get her to readin' books you'll be doin' her a favor and me too. Reckon you might loan her some book, somethin' easy to start on?"

I already did! thought Scott, with a vague start of excitement; this was coming through to him like a message from Loretta herself. He said, "If she'll take it."

"She won't at first," Conlin said positively, "but you just nip her along like a cow-dog till she's headed right."

"Can't promise," drawled Scott, "but I'll try."

There was a bang from the cabin —someone kicking open the false wall. "Right on schedule," said Conlin. "We all come back different ways, you know. They'll be driftin' in for the next hour. You go on back to your bunk. Next gold you get, you'll work for."

They got to their feet. "Come on, Henry," said Conlin. And as Scott's heart leaped into his throat, what looked like a rock shadow detached itself from the hillside and said, "Yup," and became Henry Little Hawk.

It was all Scott could do to start for the bunkhouse with an appearance of casualness. If Henry had been on that high bluff, he must

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have seen Scott give a book to the girl. Now Loretta was telling Conlin how reluctant she was. Was Conlin interested in exactly what lies were being told? Or would the fact of a lie be enough for a bullet out of the dark?

It wasn't until he was back in his bunk that he recaptured the picture of Loretta after he had handed her the book—Loretta pressing it close to her body.

That, he thought as he fell asleep again, is quite one hell of a woman.

The days sped by, easy to lose count of. Some of it was hard to take. On a ranch there's never enough time for all the work. At the hideout there was never enough work. The broken-down buildings, weathered almost to invisibility, had to stay the way they were. The horses could be cared for, shod, watered, fed, and exercised just so much. Conlin permitted a weird kind of poker, which started and finished with chips returned to their box and all tallies cancelled out; it was about as satisfying as blowing the head off a glass of branch water. Target shooting and more than a very little game hunting were out; on a still day the shots would be heard for miles. Twice Conlin let men fight; they did it out in the open, starting when Conlin said they could and knocking off when he felt they'd popped off enough steam. It was all worth it, but it wasn't easy.

Most afternoons Scott would amble up to the house and he and Loretta would sit out on the front porch and bone over their books. They stayed in plain sight, without ever discussing the matter first. Sometimes they would sit silently for hours, saying nothing, until a character in Loretta's book "essayed" something or said something "uxorious," at which time she would yell for help.

Scott missed a dictionary; he was a reader, not a scholar, and many a turn of phrase that made sense to him in context were beyond explanation when he tried it word for word. But as the days went by, Loretta learned to hurdle the unfamiliar instead of running into it head on, and increasingly the books began to talk to her instead of fighting back.

Yet sometimes after a long silent period Scott would find himself looking into her eyes. This always made them laugh, and they learned to do it inwardly, without a sound and with barely a change of expression. And sometimes they would look out across the valley and see figures moving; if the figures happened to be Conlin and Henry Little Hawk, things seemed to get said that could come out at no other time; but if the Bookkeeper and his little shadow were out of sight, it was sensible to assume that one or the other was within hearing.

It was at one of these times, while Scott was peering down the valley

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to be sure the group of men he saw breaking a horse included Conlin and the breed, that he heard a slight and disturbing sound and turned quickly to see Loretta crying. He leaned forward and took her hand. "What's the matter?"

She took a long time to find the words, and they came out as if they were hard for her to use. "You," she said. "The way you treat me. You get up when I come in, you tip your hat. If I got something to say, you wait, just like you wait to let me through a door first. All that. It means . . ."

She had to tremble for a while, and then stop trembling. "Arch, don't you know where I come from, where Conlin found me, what I was doing, what I am? Sometimes I think you . . . don't know, and then I feel ashamed, the way you . . And sometimes I think you do know, and all those things you do, they're making fun of me."

He kept his eye on the horses and let her have it out with herself. When she was quiet, he said, "Loretta, time was when I wasn't more housebroke than a four-week mongrel dog. I used to let my dinner run off my chin and I hadn't the wit to say whoa. Now am I the same Arch Scott? Sure I am. I grew up, that's all, and I don't do those things any more and never will again. Are you going to slap my hand today because I stuck it in a butter-churn thirty years ago? Folks are what they are, not what they were."

"Arch," was all she said; but you couldn't write or say how it sounded; you couldn't paint a picture of how it looked.

There were other things said during these brief intervals of open speech between them. Things about past jobs Conlin had pulled, about the way he got his information. About the way he thought. And a good deal about his men. His complete, yet scornful reliance on Henry Little Hawk; how he trusted Big Ike Friend, and his thorough understanding of the Waley brothers, Moko and Gus, whom he had bought and who would sell out at any better offer. And of course, Al Coe.

Al Coe, the big, glittering, braided, pearl-inlaid two-gun-toter, was the only man there who had "failed" the Green Spring test. Conlin had known he would, and he himself had handled the Winchester. His single shot had clipped a boulder right by Coe's head, just the way a Kaintuck rifleman barks a squirrel. He did it, he told Loretta, because he needed the man. He needed his noise and his color and the bragging, wheeling, roaring false front of him when they took a bank or robbed train passengers. The sight of him would strike terror into many a man who might take an even chance against anyone as small and ordinary-looking as Conlin, or such saddle tramps as the Waley brothers. And as Al Coe was one kind of front, for scaring people

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who were afraid of rattlesnakes. Big Ike Friend was another kind, for scaring people who are afraid of grizzly bears.

All this information came out in patches and drabs and small spurts of reminiscence. Scott never went after it openly, but he never forgot a word of it.

"Arch," Loretta murmured one afternoon as they leaned together over a book freckled with her pencil marks, "you got to watch out. Al Coe's been to Jim about you."

"About you and me?"

"Yes, that's really why, but he wouldn't dare say so—Jim would kill him. Instead he's trying to make Jim suspicious of you. He says you're a railroad detective. He says he saw you seven years ago in New Mexico."

"Yellow," said Scott. "He ever make a play for you?"

"I told you. Only that once, at the spring."

"And he got his ears pinned back. That's what I mean. I tangled with him the day after I got here, and called him. Only that once. He's had nothing to say to me ever since. What'd Conlin say when Al told him that about New Mexico?"

"Told him to go dip his head in the trough. But—you never know what Jim is thinking."

"What do you think?"

She stepped back from the table and looked at him. "A man is what he is, not what he was," she said.

He grinned, his mouth dry.

Then one day Arch Scott went to town.

He went, of course, with Conlin's permission and blessing. Conlin was suspicious of men who didn't want an occasional ride to town; they built up pressures which were unpredictable if they should explode at the hideout, and Conlin liked to predict. Scott went by himself, after accepting Conlin's suggestion of company—Big Ike Friend; Conlin did not want Big Ike to go, but he did want to see how Scott would take the suggestion, and he was satisfied.

Afterward, Conlin got a full report on what Scott had done at Elwood—from Henry Little Hawk, of course. No, Scott had not seen Henry. The little man had squatted under a blanket outside the rear door of the saloon while Scott drank; he had been in a tree outside Flo Connery's heavily curtained window during Scott's stop at Miz Flagler's honky-tonk. He had been sitting in the shadow of a packing case across the street when Scott went into the general store and when Scott came out with the schoolmaster; he had come up the alley by the school just in time to see Scott accept a book from the schoolmaster and leave with it.

Scott had cooked and camped once on the way to Elwood, once on the way back. He had seen and spoken with nobody, either time. Yes, Henry had had a word with Flo Connery and with the bartender

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at the Last Chance Saloon. Scott had been most discreet and had given no information.

Conlin received all this with satisfaction; he picked his men the way he picked his jobs, with care and forethought. He overlooked only one thing, and that simply because not even Henry Little Hawk could be everywhere. He had no inkling that two hours after Scott's departure the schoolmaster went to the sheriff's office with Scott's carefully drafted map of Casson's Quarry, a neighboring mine and cattle town, complete with the date and time and method of Conlin's next raid.

Before sundown a deputy was on the stage road to Casson's Quarry, where, after some quiet discussion, a welcome was secretly and efficiently prepared. They had more than a week to sew up the details, there at Casson's Quarry, and by the appointed day there were deputies and three sheriffs and railroad men and bank men and even a United States Marshal. Conlin was, indeed, in for a surprise, to discover that a small army knew details possessed, he thought, only by himself and the silent Henry Little Hawk.

And so, for a week after his return, life at the hideout proceeded in its quiet and uneventful way. Scott continued with his bookish visits to Loretta, who was pathetically grateful for the dictionary he brought back with him, and increasingly taken with the worlds she read about—worlds of fashion, adventure, romance, scandal in high places.

She didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Scott. Without advance warning the whole gang, except for Henry Little Hawk who had gone on ahead, assembled two hours before sundown, saddled up, and rode. By the time they camped, most of them had a pretty shrewd idea as to where they were going; but nobody said anything about it until sunup, when they squatted around the fire with their black coffee and fatback and listened to Conlin.

"This here Casson's Quarry," Conlin said, squatting in front of a clean-swept place in the dust, "is hung on the side of a hill. Most of you been there so you know what it's like. I want you two who ain't seen it yet to listen special. I want the rest of you to listen even harder; there ain't nothin' clumsier than a man who thinks he knows everything."

He began to draw in the dust. "This here's the main drag, they call the Stage Road. The town mostly tapers off gradual to the north and west, but here on the east there's a hogback that cuts it off real sharp. The Stage Road runs right down to that hogback, and the bank's spang on the last corner.

"Now, time was when the stage had to turn north a mile, on a road that angled up the hogback, and then switch back south to get down the other side, windin' up not forty yards away from the butt end of

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the main drag. Somebody got the idea of cuttin' through the hogback so the stage could drive straight through, so they done that, and it's their pride and joy; they opened it with speeches and all that, and everybody in town was drunk for two days.

"But if you go in town that way—and we do—you get through that cut and practic'ly fall into the bank. We don't scatter and we don't filter in, not this time; we go in together, fast and bunched up, and no yippin' an' ki-yi-in', either, hear me, Al? We take the bank and bounce back out again before anyone can so much as start for the sheriff's office—it's way the hell up the other end of the street.

"Coe, Ike, Scott—you three go in with me. Moko, you and your brother ride right past the front and down the alley at the other side and flush out anybody you see there. Go right around the back and around the bank to the front again and cover us—we ought to be out by then.

"Then we bunch up again and out we go through the cut. You all got it straight in your minds how to get back? Six of us—we go back six different ways. Just one thing—if you see Henry Little Hawk settin' on the hitchin' rail at the bank, go on by and don't even look at the place. We'll all go to the Piebald Bar and have a drink and go on home. Is there any questions?"

There were no questions. Conlin stood up and shuffled out the sketch he had made in the dust, and they mounted. They rode west for two miles and then left the trail and entered the woods. It was scramble and duck for a while, and once they had to lead their horses; but at last they emerged on the Stage Road, not a quarter of a mile from the cut.

From the middle of the road they could look through the hogback that barred the way like a high earthen wall, and straight up the main street of Casson's Quarry. It was all but deserted.

"Hey, Jim—bank open now, you reckon?"

"Sure, Ike. Cattle auction today, and payday at the mines."

"Don't see many people around."

"Let me do the worrying," said the Badlands Bookkeeper. "Let's get it done, boys."

They cantered down the road. They had it all to themselves.

Al Coe moved up beside Scott. "All the same to you, perfessor," he growled, "I'll stick by you."

Scott flicked a glance at him. It was the first time since that talk in the bunkhouse that Coe had said more to him than "Pass the salt."

"Help yourself, Coe," drawled Scott, "I ain't afraid to ride next to a target like that pretty hat."

"I don't figure they'll shoot no New Mexico law man," said Coe.

"You and me," said Scott steadily, "we're going to settle this thing out, right quick."

"That's what I figure," said Coe, and he rode close.

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"God," said one of the Waley brothers as they approached the cut, "a ghost town."

"Just early, that's all," said Ike.

"Let's go," said Conlin, and flicked his mount into a lope. They bunched, Al Coe shouldering Scott annoyingly. Scott glared at him, but then they were into the cut and too busy keeping out from under each other to argue.

And suddenly their way was blocked.

A small, tattered figure on a moldy gray mare suddenly appeared at the town end of the cut and ambled toward them. The little brown man seemed to be asleep on his mount.

"Chop 'im down," barked Big Ike to Conlin, who was in the lead.

"Chop hell, that's Henry!" Conlin tried to rein in, but for three, four seconds the idea didn't penetrate to the others and they crowded him at a dead run. "Whoa, dammit!" roared Conlin in the loudest voice Scott had ever heard from him.

They bumped and milled and cussed, and then all hell broke loose.

From the town end of the cut a dozen men appeared. From above, on each side, guns like thunder and lead like hail roared down. There must have been fifty men up there on the ridge, flat on their bellies, watching them come, and now half of them were pouring lead down into the ambush and half were diving and frog-hopping down the eastern slope, to close the trap at the other end.

"Back, get *back!*" shouted Conlin; but the last word was not a shout. It was an agonized grunt as a .44 slug tore through his thigh and into the side of his horse's neck. The horse screamed and reared, and Conlin fought back, twisting the animal around by brute strength, so that it was headed back through the cut as its forefeet touched the road.

Moko Waley and his mount were down, kicking and spitting their lives out; Conlin jumped them. His horse screamed again as he lunged forward.

There was a confused motion in front of him—Big Ike leading him pace for pace for an interminable moment; Big Ike, the only one of his crew who'd stick by him, stick for sure, no matter what—then Big Ike throwing his guns up in the air, riding with his hands up and empty, and terror on his face as he swung his head from side to side, hoping someone in the posse would see him surrendering.

To one side was Gus Waley, afoot, hands up too. On the other side was Al Coe, maybe in a panic, crowding Arch Scott to a standstill against the rock wall.

Then there was nothing ahead of Conlin but a line of men across the road, between him and the badlands, and suddenly he was afloat in the air, his horse gone out from under; and then a jarring, red-hazed impact as he fell, and the wound in his thigh scalding with

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road grit. He got one foot up, the other knee under him, and wavered there; then there was a thunder of hoofs behind him and Henry Little Hawk landed lightly in the dust. The little breed caught Conlin under the armpits and heaved. It was a desperate, impossible effort; Conlin threw out an arm for balance and felt his hand on a saddle-horn.

Then somehow he was lying face down on the back of the breed's gray mare, rushing the line of deputies, riding two of them down.

When Conlin glanced back, he saw Henry Little Hawk lying in the road, one leg twisted crazily. He was propped up on his elbow, waving goodbye like an old woman watching a train pull out of a depot.

There were horsemen at the town end of the cut, but none here; and the cut was full of crazy horses, dead horses, dead and crazy men; so Conlin got clean away on the breed's horse.

Back in the cut Arch Scott was crowded to the wall by Coe and his big black stallion. A man afoot, with a big shiny star pinned to his vest, shouted, "This way, Mr. Scott, this way, I'll cover you."

A hurt-animal sound woke her, and she lay dazedly for a moment, thinking it was part of some unhappy dream. But then she heard it again and flew out of bed and down the narrow stairs.

Out front, on the grass near the door, Jim Conlin lay face down making the noise. A few feet away stood Henry's gray mare, blown and foundered, the reins over her head and a rope of spittle carrying clear from her bloody mouth to the ground.

Loretta got the Bookkeeper inside somehow, and somehow got his clothes off and washed away that special mud made of dust, blood, and sweat, until she could find out where he was hurt. Actually it wasn't much of a wound, as such things go—a little hole here and a large one nearby where the slug had gone through. It had missed the thighbone and had almost stopped bleeding. But it hurt, and maybe it wouldn't heal. She did what she could. She did pretty well.

He didn't talk for a long time. When he did, he said, "All gone. All, all gone. He saved me, Loretta, and he died."

"Big Ike?"

"Big Ike!" he snorted. "Tucked his tail down and threw away his guns."

"Al Coe?"

"Dead. They shot him dead, then they shot him some more."

She had to know, but . . . don't ask, don't ask; maybe—"The Waleys?"

"Moko dead. Gus, he and Big Ike quit." Conlin half rose, screwing up his face. "Big Ike surrendered, you know that?" he shouted.

"Shh. Shh. Did . . . was it Arch Scott who saved you?"

"Damn it, I *told* you." He sank

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back. "I always said 'the breed.' Never slept in the bunkhouse with the others. He never asked to, but I tell you, I'd have laughed if he ever did, kicked his butt, the breed. Never ate with us white men, except campin'. He was the one, the only damn one—he saved me, and he died."

"Henry," she identified, finally.

"All eyes, all brains. Tried to warn us, then he saved me, then he died."

She hit herself softly on the temples. "Jimmy, for the love of God—"

"All gone. That Coe, crazy as hell. Never tried to fight, never tried to run. Hung on to Scott, watching him every second, then shot him in the head. Then they cut Coe to pieces—crazy . . ."

"Scott—dead?"

"All gone," said the Bookkeeper. "All gone."

After a time he said, "Loretta?"

"Get some sleep," she said hoarsely. "You got to get some sleep."

He nodded weakly. "Yuh. Some . . . Loretta, they'll be comin'. Big Ike, if he'd quit, he'd bring 'em. And Gus Waley. Always said he'd sell me out for a good enough price. They got the price now—his dirty neck for mine." He breathed painfully for a while. "We'll take all the gold we can carry, Loretta. You pack anything you want, and we'll start again some place." He caught up with his breathing again, then opened his eyes and looked around the lamplit room. "Loretta?"

But she was not there.

In the morning Jim Conlin woke up. He had a fever. There was a bottle of water nearby and he drank it all.

There was also a note.

i didn't take nothing but my dictionary i'm going in morning if you can understand that then i'm going back to work don't try and find me not ever.

L

"All, all gone," Conlin muttered. He dragged himself upstairs and got fresh clothes. He wondered what had happened. Al Coe had said Scott was a railroad man, but Al was always a trouble-maker. Henry, he'd know what happened.

He found Henry's long Winchester. It made a pretty good crutch. He got to his cache and took as much gold as he could drag. It wasn't much. He inched it down to the corral and caught a gelding and got the gold on. He roped a black, an old one, but the only one that would hold still for the kind of roping he was doing now. He got a saddle on it, led it to the bars, and climbed up on them and fell into the saddle. He rode off, leading the gelding.

They found the gelding, dead, in a ravine a month later. They got that gold and all that was in the cache too. Jim Conlin, the Badlands Bookkeeper, was never caught. Maybe the Mexicans got him, maybe fever. Maybe he's still alive.

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a new story by

A. H. Z. CARR

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: A. H. Z. CARR

TITLE: *The Man Who Understood Women*

TYPE: A Study in Deduction

DEDUCER: Milliken

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *In which Milliken, the playwright, makes like Sherlock Holmes in a brilliant display of deduction-off-the-cuff: you can tell all you want to know about a woman just by looking at her—and here's the undeniable proof!*

WE WERE HAVING LUNCH TOgether, the four of us, and we started talking about women. Whately, Barker, and I agreed that Dr. Kinsey notwithstanding, women are enigmatic creatures, difficult for the male to comprehend. Whately told a story about his wife to prove it, then Barker and I told stories about our wives to prove it.

Milliken disagreed, as he always does. He is a bachelor, and he writes plays. When we told him that he did not know what he was talking about, he paid no attention.

"The trouble with you husbands," he said, "is that you allow yourselves to be bewildered by what your wives say to you. In my experience—let me finish—if a man listens to what a woman says, he's done for. But he can tell all he has to know about a woman just by looking at her."

He ignored a small crust of bread that Barker threw at him, and continued. "A woman's appearance gives her away every time. It enables you to tell what she has been doing and to predict what she will do. That is, it reveals all this to the discerning."

"Like you," said Whately, frankly sneering.

"Like me," agreed Milliken. "I suppose it's only natural that you

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fellows should regard women as mysterious. You're all married to wives much smarter than yourselves. But to one who observes carefully, thinks clearly, and has a reasonable amount of intuition, a woman's secret thoughts are exposed before she ever opens her mouth."

Barker said, "It's easy enough to talk."

"It isn't talk. Do you remember Kate Loring, the heroine of my last play?"

"You mean the one that closed the second week?" I said. There is no point in being subtle with Milliken.

"That has nothing to do with it. Everybody who saw the play was sure that I had known a woman like Kate Loring intimately at some time in my life. Because I understood her, felt her, I caught her essence. As a matter of fact, it wasn't the fault of the script that the play flopped. If Hogan, the producer, had only"—

"Stick to the point," said Whately, who is a lawyer.

"All right, then. Now actually, I never even met a woman like Kate Loring. But I saw her once, sitting at a distance of ten feet, in a bar. I studied her for a few minutes, and at the end of that time I knew her past, her future, her whole life, better than she knew it herself."

"Do you dare to say," Barker put in, "that you can look at *any* woman and deduce the facts of her private life just from her appearance?"

"That's what I have been telling you," Milliken said patiently. "I do not say that mine is a unique gift. With application, you could all do it. Even Bob here, if given time and help, might make a stab at it."

"Give us an example," Barker urged. "Take that woman who just came in. At the third table, with that tall man. She looks interesting. What can you tell us about her?"

For some time Milliken stared at the woman indicated. Neither she nor her escort noticed us. They were discussing the menu. Finally Milliken said, "Very well. She is a good subject—an unusual woman. I will take you step by step through the process, leaving out nothing, so you can see exactly how I do it."

He ordered another drink before going on. "That woman is intelligent and purposeful. She is unmarried. Although at one time in her life she was well off, she is now having a hard time making ends meet. A very hard time. Money, or the lack of it, has become almost an obsession with her." He held up his hand to prevent interruption.

"She is in love with that man, and he is with her. He, too, is poor. Now, at the age of thirty-three or thirty-four, she is still highly attractive. But she feels that her chances of the good life are ebbing. And she intends to marry another man, a wealthy man."

"Oh, now, really, Milliken!" exclaimed Barker.

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"I've hardly begun," Milliken said. "Within the last few days she has returned from a long stay abroad. She was on the Mediterranean—probably North Africa, Algiers. The chances are that she met the man she intends to marry on that trip."

Whately caught my eye and shrugged. Milliken smiled grimly. "I see that you don't believe me. Let me tell you something else. Her true lover, the man with her now, does not yet know her intention. Soon—perhaps at this very luncheon—she will break the news to him. She will do it even at the expense of her self-respect. For money, as I have said, is now the dominating force of her life. She will sacrifice everything for financial security."

We looked at the woman, and Milliken lowered his voice. "Even now, while she laughs gaily at her companion's remarks, she is considering how best to broach the subject. If we sit here long enough we will witness high drama—the shattering of a sincere love on the shoals of poverty."

He paused for effect and breath. After a short silence Whately said flatly, "Prove it."

"I shall," said Milliken. "Take first the question of intelligence. Observe the broad, high, well-developed forehead and the alert, wide-open eyes—her whole expression, animated yet controlled. These are the universal marks of a good mind. Just as the eyebrows, the set of the mouth, and the resolute chin indicate firmness of character."

This seemed reasonable—or possible—so we said nothing.

"Glance at her hands, feet, ankles, wrists. Slender and shapely, the bones solid but unobtrusive, the limbs rounded. Note the fine texture of her hair. And then her poise, the ease of her manner, her self-assurance, her great natural dignity. These are signs of breeding which even you fellows should be able to recognize."

"There's nothing remarkable about that," Whately said. "I put her down for an intelligent, well-bred woman myself."

"Good. You're coming along," Milliken replied. "How would you deduce that her family was once well-to-do?"

"You're doing this," said Whately, a certain slyness in his tone.

Milliken smiled. "Well, then, observe her clothes. In admirable taste. Expensive. That hat, that dress, those shoes come from Paris."

"How do you know that?" I demanded.

Milliken looked pained. "Surely it is obvious." If he had added, "my dear Watson," I should have kicked him then and there—but he had sense enough to refrain. "The dress is the clue. Fabrics like that are simply not woven in this country. And then, notice the restrained fullness in the upper arm and the subtle molding of the material around the

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bust. Only Balenciaga or Molyneux gets that effect. As for the hat, it bears the stamp of the Faubourg St. Honoré all over it. Even our smartest shops never quite achieve the quality of excitement that is added by that twist of the crown. The shoes, too, are definitely French. American designers haven't yet adopted that two-way curve of the instep."

None of us felt qualified to argue these points. Whately said, "If her clothes come from Paris, wouldn't that signify she is well off?"

"Ha!" said Milliken. "That's just where the amateur goes wrong. Instead of studying essential details, you jump at conclusions. Of course the clothes are expensive—I said so. But—and mark this—they are far from new. Look carefully, and you can see a slight giving at the seam of the sleeve of her cloth coat. And the shoes, although elegant, are creased by use. The purse is relatively cheap and certainly outmoded. No woman would spoil the whole effect of an ensemble with such a purse if she could afford a finer one. What must we deduce therefore? When she buys clothes, she buys good ones, but she has few. Once she had money enough to indulge expensive tastes. Now, lacking money, she still tries to indulge those tastes."

"You're just guessing," Whately objected. "Her clothes don't necessarily signify her own taste. She may not have selected them herself. Somebody may have given them to her."

"Whately, you're not thinking. Look at that aristocratic, proud face. This is no lady's maid, no poor companion, no impoverished relative, to accept hand-me-downs."

"Well, maybe a man"—Whately began.

"You're suggesting that she is someone's mistress? A kept woman?"

"Why not? There are such women—or haven't you heard?"

"It is your idea that this woman would go into a shop with a man and let *him* pick out her clothes? Good heavens, is this the legal mind in action? Use your head, man! Her refusal to pluck her eyebrows, her subtle use of cosmetics—does that suggest a woman who depends on the fancy of a man for support? The kept woman invariably tries to look feminine and fascinating. She cannot resist the little superficial touches that arrest most masculine eyes—the exaggeration of curves, the vivid color. But not this woman, gentlemen. There can be absolutely no doubt that those clothes were selected by a woman of taste—selected to please herself."

Whately cleared his throat and for a moment looked combative; but he said nothing. I took up the gauntlet. "You still haven't convinced me," I said, "that she is poor. Just because she is wearing an old dress and coat at this moment—"

"There's other evidence. I call

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your attention to her hair where it shows under her hat. Obviously her natural shade, that brown—and not really flattering. If it were a shade lighter, a dark blonde, the effect would be ravishing—and she must know it. Moreover, there's her hair-do. That bun in the back does nothing for her. She certainly would not wear it that way if she could afford a first-class hairdresser."

I had to admit that this did indeed look like drastic economy. "Even so," I contended, "that doesn't mean money is an obsession with her, as you claimed."

"Then you missed the expression on her face when that stout overdressed woman across the room came in. If you had seen our subject's lips tighten when she glanced at that mink coat, you would know what I mean when I speak of an obsession. What was she envying, if not five thousand dollars' worth of mink? Here we have a poised, controlled, proud woman. When she allows such an expression to appear on her face for such a reason, you may be sure that the longing for money has sunk deep into her heart."

"All that may be so," said Barker. "But what I want to know is how you deduced the love affair you spoke of."

Milliken nodded. "Did you get a good look at our lady's escort before he sat down? A fine-looking man. Generous, open features. Not an acquisitive nature. Look at his hands —strong, bony fingers. The hands of an artist—a musician, perhaps, or a painter. But not a 'successful' man. He is close to forty—an age when men who have achieved success wear the stamp of it. But his eyes have a worried look, and his clothes are cheap and ready-made."

"How do you know they're ready-made?" I said, thinking of my own, which were.

"The shoulders are a dead give-away. Those wrinkles at the seams —characteristic of the mass-produced suit, after it has been worn a while. That man is hard up, depend on it."

"Then what's he doing taking her to a restaurant like this?" Whately demanded.

"Ah, there is a good point. Under what conditions does a man strain his purse for a woman? He will do it if he loves her—and especially if it is their first meeting after a long separation. But did you notice that she refused a cocktail? And that he attempted to insist? The inference is clear. She likes a cocktail, he knows it, but she is sparing his pocketbook. And the meal she ordered—ravioli. Substantial and filling, but decidedly inexpensive. Isn't it obvious that he can't really afford an elaborate luncheon?"

"You said she loves him," Barker persisted. "Is that why you thought so—just because she refused a cocktail and ordered ravioli?"

Milliken shook his head. "Her eyes, Barker, her eyes. Surely you

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have seen love in a woman's face before. The tenderness of her smile tells us all. And he loves her, too. Twice he has surreptitiously touched her hand. He hardly takes his eyes from her face. Lovers, beyond a doubt."

"Maybe you're right," said Barker.

"Of course I'm right."

"But the other man—the rich one," Whately interjected. "Where does he come in? And how do you know she has just been abroad?"

"Start with her complexion," said Milliken. "That deep coat of tan. Where did she get it, in late November?"

"Sun lamp," I suggested.

"Nonsense. People who use sun lamps regularly have pale spots around the eyes, where they put the protective pads. Anyone can see that is no artificial tan."

"Florida?" said Barker.

"At this time of the year? Incredible. Besides, look at her gestures. She is an Anglo-Saxon type, but she uses her hands and shoulders freely. The chances are excellent that she picked up the habit of free gesticulation on the Mediterranean, as so many American women do. But that's not all. You see those two heavy silver bracelets with the exotic design?"

The woman and her companion were so absorbed in their conversation that they never noticed our surreptitious glances. "What about the bracelets?" I said.

"They are the kind of thing you get only in North Africa. The design is absolutely distinctive. And they are not cheap—not the stuff that is provided for the regular tourist trade. Those blue stones in the lower bangle are sapphires, I would swear. I have seen similar things in Marrakesh—there's a shop there that specializes in them."

"Somebody who has recently come back from there may have given them to her," Whately pointed out.

"One, perhaps," Milliken said. "But two? Besides, you will notice that the two bracelets are quite different in detail—and yet both are a perfect match for that dress. Put it all together and what do you have? For this woman to buy two such expensive pieces for herself, when she needs a new handbag, is altogether out of character. For any friend to have bought her two such carefully chosen bracelets, of the same type, is highly unlikely. Add the deep suntan—and can't you see it? She is strolling in Marrakesh, or possibly Algiers, with a friend. She sees the bracelets in a shop window, glinting in the sunlight, and stops to admire them. No woman could resist entering to inquire the price.

"Try to imagine it," Milliken went on, with the air of a visionary. "She looks at some bracelets, is tempted, but disturbed by the price. Finally she succumbs. Very well—she will buy one, the less expensive

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one. It will mean not buying the new handbag that she needs—but the urge is irresistible and the bracelet goes so perfectly with the dress. It is then that her friend picks up the other bracelet, the one with the sapphires, and insists on presenting her with it."

We all objected at once. "Sheer romancing," Whately growled.

"Not in the least," Milliken replied stoutly. "I admit that I have reconstructed this scene intuitively, rather than from wholly physical evidence. Still, it explains the facts—it explains them better than any other theory you can offer."

"But you're not consistent," I protested. "If this woman is poor, how could she have afforded a trip to Europe and North Africa?"

"My dear fellow," Milliken said, looking at me as if he were wearing a monocle; there are times when he imagines himself to be Lord Peter Wimsey. "Many people of small means manage to get to Europe. They save for it—or they receive a small inheritance—or they win the trip in a contest—or some wealthy aunt puts up the cash. Surely you don't expect me to give you every last detail of her finances. I will tell you, though, that she just got back."

"How do you know that?" I said.

"Again, a combination of things. The weather has been cloudy for weeks, yet her tan has not yet worn off. Even more important, look at her as she talks. The flow of her words, the animation of the man's response, the air of excitement around them. This is plainly their first meeting in a long while. But can you imagine that two people who are in love would let an unnecessary day go by before meeting? She has returned recently, very recently. She may have flown, but my guess is that she came in on the *Liberté,* which docked yesterday. Attractive women usually prefer a boat crossing."

"Still," I said, "I don't get this other man. It seems to me you have just rung him in without reason."

"A lovely woman on a trip abroad, and you do not see a man in the picture? Why, you could not keep men away from her! On a boat especially, a French boat, on her way to Paris, she would have a choice of ardent males within two days. And the man in this case is very likely a Frenchman. Here my reasoning may be a little tenuous, I admit. I judge from the quality of the sentiment in that bracelet, and the fact that it was bought in Algiers. A Frenchman might well have encouraged her to go there. I don't insist on the point, though. All I say is that there was a man, that he is wealthy, and that she has decided to marry him."

"That's all," said Whately, with heavy sarcasm.

"You doubt me? Then I take it that you did not notice the ring she wears on the third finger of her right hand. No, you cannot see it

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now. She has turned the stone inward. It is a beautiful cabochon emerald, which must have cost thousands. The man with her has been glancing at it curiously, even anxiously, and she has dropped her hand into her lap. She is fidgeting with the ring nervously, now."

Whately frowned. "What of it?"

"Man, man," Milliken sighed. "Don't you see? Her companion is too proud to ask her outright about the ring. But he has never seen it before. What must we conclude? She acquired the ring on the trip from which she has just returned. Where would she get it? She could not afford to buy it for herself. But it is precisely the kind of ring that a wealthy man of excellent taste would give to the woman he loves—and that a woman like her would accept only from the man she intends to marry."

"But she's wearing the ring on her right hand," Barker said.

"Just so, Barker. Ask yourself why."

When Barker looked uncertain, Milliken said, "It's because she does not wish to announce blatantly to her real lover, the man with her now, that she is engaged to marry another. She wants to tell him at the right moment, in the way that will hurt him least. That's the only reasonable explanation of her behavior."

"Then why does she wear the ring at all?" I said.

"Where are your sensibilities? She does not want to deceive this man, or to act a part. This is a fine woman, as you must realize by now. She is letting him draw his own inferences, letting him suspect the truth, so that when the dénouement comes it will not be a complete shock to him. See the tenderness in her glance. There is even a little pain in her eyes when she looks away. And now, consider: what would impel her to give up the man she loves for another? We already know the answer. She needs, she craves money. That is the weak spot in an otherwise noble character. To her, happiness without money is inconceivable."

There was tremendous intensity in Milliken's manner as he spoke, and his eyes were somber. He went on, "She will tell him soon—very soon, now. Possibly after the coffee is served. She will not want to prolong the agony of his suspense, or her own self-reproaches. This is going to cost her something of her self-respect, but she cannot help it. Love with her is less important at this moment than security. That is what modern life does to people. And that, you may be sure, is what she is thinking at this moment, behind her mask of gayety."

None of us spoke. After a moment, Milliken said, "Here we are, four total strangers to this woman. Yet, through a little observation, a little insight, we unravel the mystery of her life. We glimpse her tragedy at the very moment of its cli-

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max. We know her past and present. We can guess at her hard, brilliant, regretful future. We understand her motives and her actions; we can predict her behavior. And how have we done all this? Merely, as I maintained in the beginning, by looking at her."

"By George," said Barker. "I've got to admit—that's pretty good."

Whately said grudgingly, "I've got to admit too—you have made out a case."

"There could be something in it," I said.

Milliken glanced at his watch, then rose suddenly. "Great Scott, I've got to run. You take care of my end of the check, will you?" And he dashed off.

We did not mind. It seemed to us that he had earned his lunch. We had all learned something, and we sat silently, thinking how we might apply the lesson Milliken had taught us. If observation and analysis could enable us to penetrate the innermost secrets of our wives' hearts, the power we would gain!

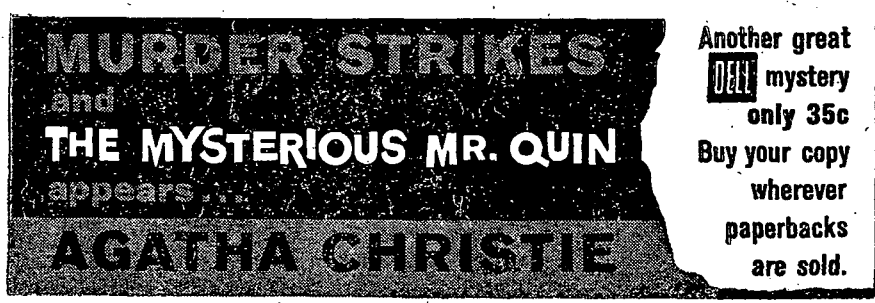
We paid the check and stood up to go. As we passed the table where the couple who had occupied our minds was sitting, we heard a snatch of their conversation.

"Dickie said the cutest thing this morning after you left the house," the woman was saying. "He said, 'Mummy, why does daddy have to go—' "

We could not hear the rest.

I looked back at the third finger of her left hand, and there was the unmistakable mark of a wedding ring, tight-fitting and long-worn. I suppose she had taken it off for some reason.

The next time Milliken has lunch with us, he pays for it. The charlatan!



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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Too frequently we think of Conan Doyle solely as the author (or agent) of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. As a healthy corrective, for the centennial of his birth, please hasten to read his GREAT STORIES, selected by John Dickson Carr (British Book Centre, $3.50); and you will understand why, even if he had never written (or agented) a single Holmes adventure, we should still salute Doyle as one of the world's great storytellers.

★★★★ **THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER, *by Philip MacDonald*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
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★★★ **SLEEP LONG, MY LOVE, *by Hillary Waugh*** (Crime Club, $2.95)
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Nobody knows more about professional organizations of writers than Mr. Stout, who uses this knowledge to create one of Nero Wolfe's better long cases, with a pretty puzzle in plagiarism.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **SAMUEL ELKIN**

TITLE: ***Survival of the Fittest***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Rogers

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Meet as deep-dyed a villain, as black-hearted a scoundrel, as you have ever met in print—a handsome, charming egotist who preyed mercilessly on susceptible ladies of refinement—and wealth . . .*

"YOU WANT TO TELL ME ABOUT IT?" Lieutenant Rogers held three bullets in the palm of his right hand. He was a tall, thin man with a voice that seemed to roll into every corner of the small office. He was half sitting, half standing against the center edge of his desk. In front of him, and almost side by side in two stiff-backed chairs, sat the two sisters, Eva and Dora Brampton.

"Well, ladies?"

Rogers moved his eyes from one face to the other, searching for the slightest sign of emotion that might reveal the one sister who was guilty of murder.

But both women were tight-faced, tight-lipped. Neither one so much as glanced at the bullets in his hand.

Rogers spoke quietly. "These are the three bullets taken out of Paul Sheparton's body. Two of them could have killed Sheparton instantly." He leaned forward, his eyes narrowing. Deliberately he put an edge to his voice. "All right. I'll tell you something you don't know, ladies. The bullets are of different calibers."

Their eyes widened and simultaneously, as if on signal, they turned their heads and looked at each other.

But that was all.

When they faced him again, the

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vacant expressions had returned to their faces. Rogers tossed the bullets into the wooden file on his desk.

The younger one, Dora, spoke in a peculiarly flat voice, "He deserved to die." And though Eva didn't speak, Rogers knew she felt the same way. He knew quite a few things now that he hadn't known yesterday when both women were brought in and booked on suspicion of murder. For one thing, there was Paul Sheparton's diary which he'd read and reread a dozen times.

Rogers studied their faces again. Dora Brampton was unquestionably the prettier of the two. She was thirty-seven. Eva was forty-eight. It wasn't that the older sister had a hard face, but it was an aging face. Yet there was a strange kind of softness in it, too. As though life and its many anxieties had passed her by. No doubt Paul Sheparton had first observed this paradox and knew he could turn it into an asset.

Rogers said, "Whether he deserved to die or not is beside the point. The point is, which one of you shot the bullet that killed Paul Sheparton?"

No answer.

"Or did you both kill him at the same time?"

Still no answer.

Rogers sighed. He picked up a soft leather-bound book from his desk. He said, "Ladies, did you know Paul Sheparton kept a diary?"

Eva Brampton gasped and Rogers pounced on her.

"Quite a character, this Sheparton. I'd say this diary is the record of an egotist, a sick man. Wouldn't you?"

Under the older sister's widened gaze Rogers opened the book and read, *"I am unique. I am a man without a stupid conscience. I am the survivor of the fittest."*

Rogers frowned. "How did respectable women like you ever get mixed up with such a blackguard?" Suddenly he took the bite out of his voice. "Look, ladies. Let me say this unofficially. I'm on your side. After reading this diary I can well understand how one of you could have been driven to kill Paul Sheparton. But that doesn't take away from the fact that there's a murder charge here. One of you will have to face it. Or both of you, if I don't find out which one is guilty."

He waited.

Waited.

And then he knew that for the moment he had lost them. Eva Brampton's face retained the vacant stare. Dora Brampton didn't move a muscle.

Rogers felt a pinch of annoyance.

"Do I have to reconstruct the whole thing from this diary?" he said. "I can do it, you know. It's complete. It's all here."

That wasn't entirely true, but he'd have to play his hand out. He turned to a page in the book and began to read, *"This morning. The first one, Eva Brampton. The older sister. Not quite my type except for*

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her money, which is considerable. We met as I planned it. Alone in the corridor . . ."

Oh, yes, Eva thought, remembering the meeting. How could she forget it? It was the kind of meeting one sees in the movies or reads about in romantic books. A young girl's dream, but had she ever been a girl?

That morning she had left Dora in the hotel suite to go shopping for a pair of gloves. She had just pressed the button at the elevator when a door opened down the hall. She turned around and watched him, tall, blond-haired, and very handsome, come striding down the hallway in that self-assured, confident way he had. She faced around to the elevator again, but was very conscious of his presence as his hand reached out for the signal button, then stopped.

"Did you press?" he asked. He was smiling.

She nodded and smiled in return.

He pressed again. "Well, another ring won't hurt. Elevator operators like to take their time."

He looked at her, still smiling, and she turned her eyes away.

Then he said, "I don't bet—but I'll give odds you are not from New York."

This time she smiled fully. She couldn't help herself. That was one of her charms. "I'm afraid you'd win," she said.

"Business?"

She shook her head. "Pleasure trip."

"Don't mind my curiosity, but it's a kind of game with me."

The elevator door opened at that moment and before she could enter he held out his arm for her.

"Allow me."

It was like a gesture out of another age—the chivalrous age. She put her hand on his arm and permitted him to lead her into the elevator.

Somehow, later, after lunch sometime (she was vague as to how it all happened), she was seated across a small table from him in a cocktail lounge, a warm and softly lighted place. The drink she was sipping glowed inside of her.

"Since you're in New York for pleasure," he said, "why not let me show you around?"

She looked at this handsome smiling young man. She recalled that back in her mind there were words she did not want to be thinking. Why was he doing this? It isn't possible—he's so much younger than I am. Yet, all she could do was stare at him until he asked, "Why do you look at me that way?"

And she said, "I don't mean to insult you, Mr. Sheparton."

"Paul. Please."

"All right. Paul."

"Fine. Now we're past the awkward stage."

"Are we?"

She remembered the expression in his face then. Small and soft and

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tender as he said gently, "So you're older than I am. Is that important?"

"At least ten years older," she said.

He leaned over the table and took her hands in his. "I've always found older women much more fascinating," he said.

Her voice shook as she replied, "You're very kind, Paul."

A new world had opened up for her. How could she resist it? She had never known a world like it. Always, since childhood, she had been pressed under her mother's fears and inhibitions. Later, when Dora came along, she wove a net of responsibility to her sister around herself. And when her mother finally passed away it was the Brampton estate and all the other Brampton interests that kept life away from her.

But that first night, when Paul was to take her to supper and the theater, it was like—well, as if she were standing in the doorway to an entirely new life—a life brimming with laughter and joy and excitement that would taste sweeter than any wine ever brewed . . .

Dora wasn't home when she began to dress, so could not advise her on what to wear. But Eva needed no advice. She knew that everything she put on that night was just right, perfect. Except for her earrings, she was all dressed when Dora came into the room.

Dora's first remark was a puzzled "Are we going somewhere?"

Eva tried to contain herself, but there was too much exuberance running through her and she spilled over.

"Oh, Dora, Dora! This morning I met the most wonderful man. It was like something out of . . ."

She stopped.

The sudden shocked expression on Dora's face stopped her.

"Without me?" Dora said.

A quick feeling of guilt slipped into her. She pushed it aside instantly.

"Well," she said. "It just happened."

Silence, and the silence touched her with fear. She remembered thinking: I've nothing to be afraid of, nothing to be afraid or ashamed of.

She laughed. "He'll be here in a few minutes. I want you to meet him. I think he's quite wonderful." And then she had a brilliant idea. "Why don't I ask him to get another date for you?"

Like a coiled spring suddenly released, Dora snapped, "What are we—high school girls?"

Immediately she tried to apologize, but Dora cut her off.

"I don't like to just tag along."

They were silent for a long moment. Eva wanted to make amends, so she said, "Don't be angry with me, Dora. Please."

"That's something you should have considered this afternoon," Dora said. "We both agreed before coming to New York that we'd

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go everywhere together . . . *together.*"

"But this wasn't . . ."

"You don't see me attempting to meet a man, do you?"

The remark horrified Eva. "What a thing to say! Why, you make it sound ugly. We just happened to meet, that's all."

The doorbell buzzed then and, nervously, she went to the door, opened it, and Paul, his handsomeness, his assurance beaming there like a huge warm light, melted her fears in an instant. He took her hands, smiling down at her.

"How lovely," he said. "So gentle and lovely."

Then he saw Dora.

"I didn't know you had a sister," he said, and added, "Look, why don't I call a friend? We can all go out together."

Dora's eyes blazed. She spoke in slow and measured tones. "We don't go out together. Thank you."

She ran away from Dora into the bedroom, presumably to put on her earrings. But, really, she had to get out of the room for fear of bursting into tears. She was gone a few minutes longer than necessary. When she returned Paul was standing by the door, smiling. Dora was over at the window, gazing outside. Just before they left Paul spoke to Dora in a voice that, to her, seemed tinged with sarcasm.

"I promise to bring your sister home early. You needn't stay up and worry."

Of course, now she knew that Paul Sheparton had revealed the first clue to his true purpose when he called Dora her sister even before any introductions were made. For how could he know that unless he had found out all about them beforehand? Why not her girl friend or a visitor? Certainly they did not look at all alike.

Yet, even now, she wondered if it would have made any difference to her if she had known from the beginning what Paul Sheparton was after. For in that wonderful, wonderful short time of her life her eyes were too full of stars to see anything else but the kind of happiness that had, for so many miserable years, eluded her . . .

Rogers read, *"It went perfectly. I could see the anger and the frustration in Dora's face. But I had expected it, of course. A man of my intelligence anticipates the motivations, the drives, the angers that lie so close to the surface of us all. Dora's hidden desires were so simple to uncover. Even as Eva's.*

"But the crowning achievement of the evening came later when Eva and I returned. In the hallway I offered her a gun. I told her there were many robberies in the hotel. I told her that a woman alone needs a gun to protect herself in New York's streets. Very trustingly she said to me, 'But I won't be alone any more, will I?'

"And I replied, 'Take this until

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the time when you're never alone again.' She looked at me and smiled, and then put the gun in her handbag. And, of course, to show my concern for her, I kissed her tenderly. She responded quite admirably for a middle-aged woman . . ."

Rogers stopped and glanced at Eva Brampton's face. He saw the pained expression come into her eyes and felt a sudden moment of anger at himself for having read that last line.

"Why must you make me read this—this junk aloud?" he said, and then softly to Eva Brampton, "Did *you* kill him?"

Eva looked at Rogers for a long moment. She was thinking how cruel Paul had been, how he had planned for everything, how he had even anticipated her most secret feelings. And yet, could she really say, even now, that she was glad he was dead?

Rogers frowned again as he saw there would be no answer from the older sister. He watched the younger one's lips curl into a small smile. And he knew the sisters were far from breaking down.

The thought came to him again that he should question each sister alone. But again it was replaced by the fascination he found unable to resist. He had to admit it. He admired the sisters' stubbornness, and a compulsion to discover how much longer they could go on this way took hold of him once more.

He turned to another page in the book and continued reading, "*So came the next part of my plan. And this would take a little more ingenuity. But for someone of my capabilities the challenge was all-important. What I had to do was channel the bitter and frustrated Dora into the right direction . . .*"

From the beginning Dora felt there was something rotten in Paul Sheparton. It started with the shock of seeing him for the very first time as he walked into their suite, armed with his youth, his good looks, with the egotism of his bearing.

And when Eva ran into the bedroom he came over to her, smiling in his charming, intimate way, saying, "I didn't know Eva had a younger sister."

Her voice trembled as she said, "What does that mean?"

"Should it mean anything?"

She wanted to hurt him, knowing somehow that nothing she could say would hurt him. Yet she tried, asking sharply, "Aren't you a little young for my sister?"

He gazed down into her eyes, that attractive smile of his playing around the corners of his lips. Finally he said, "But not too young for you?"

She knew then that he was something out of a romantic novel—the polished seducer, the perfumed dandy with wig and buckled shoes and perfect manners. Even the way he phrased his words in the diary had a certain 18th century flavor.

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Yet, so violent was her jealousy toward Eva that she allowed herself to be stabbed by his words, tortured by his actions. Now, she knew, he had depended on this twist in her behavior.

Which was why he made the remark about bringing Eva home early.

Which was why there were the phone calls. At least once every night that he took Eva out.

Which was why there were the personal visits. Always while she was home alone.

The pattern was always the same. He would ring the bell, and when she answered there he was standing in the doorway.

Immediately she would become flustered.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing. Just dropped by to say hello."

"Hello and goodbye."

"Dora."

"Eva isn't here."

"May I come in?"

She couldn't stand the thought of being alone with him. It frightened her. And she would slam the door in his face. Now, of course, it was perfectly obvious he wanted her to do just that . . .

Rogers read, *"It would have concerned me profoundly if she did not slam the door in my face. Because what would this indicate? No jealousy between the sisters. As it was, all I had to do was follow the preordained script. Play on Dora's jealousy. Irritate, twist, irritate, twist . . ."*

Oh, how he could do that, Dora thought, remembering the miserable evenings she spent home alone, sunken so deep in despair and loneliness that she actually looked forward to his phone calls. When they came she grew limp with jealousy. She never finished a conversation with him over the phone. She would always slam down the receiver and throw herself onto the bed.

Then when Eva returned home she would pretend to be asleep, but she could hear them in the other room. She didn't fool Paul Sheparton. Not him. He spoke in stage whispers, enunciating his words clearly to be sure Dora wouldn't miss a single syllable.

Oh, how she hated this man! But, unfortunately, not for sane reasons. When she saw Eva blossoming right in front of her eyes, happy, full of life and excitement, the bitter jealousy surged in her with such force that it made her sick. Alone, she cried out at the injustice of it all. She cursed Eva for her past overprotectiveness, for having surrounded her with wealth and inhibitions. Everything—everything except people, human beings, laughter, gayety, fun—love.

But most of all she hated Eva for seeking her own way out of this lonely, ugly, frustrating life and abandoning her to it forever. . . .

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Rogers read, *"It is two weeks since I began my campaign with the Brampton sisters. The time has now come for the big step . . ."*

Oh, yes, Dora thought, the big step. In her mind's eye she saw the vivid picture of herself, alone in the room.

Hearing the phone ring.

Watching herself move over to the phone to answer, knowing it would be Paul.

His voice was low and whispery.

It frightened her.

She could hardly say, "Eva isn't here."

"I don't want Eva. I want you."

Her eyes suddenly blurred with tears. It was the first time he had said anything so direct "Please," she begged. "Please leave me alone."

"I'm in my room," he said. "I shall hang up. I shall leave my room and walk down the hall. I shall ring your doorbell and you'll open the door—and—let—me—in."

She became frantic. "No! Please don't do that! Paul, Paul . . ."

He had hung up.

She felt a thousand pains shoot through her.

She didn't know whether to run, hide, stay.

Shame, loneliness. Fear, emptiness.

She put her hands over her face.

She was sobbing.

She heard him coming along the hallway.

The doorbell rang.

She couldn't move.

The doorbell rang again.

And then, as though she had no control over her mind or body, she was at the door, opening it, and he was in the room—and she was in his arms.

What happened then? Words were spoken. She remembered Paul saying something about Eva falling in love with him and how he never wanted that.

Did she say, "I've been going crazy thinking about you and Eva."

And did he say, "It was never Eva. Never. I like her, yes. But love —*no!* I love you, Dora."

She remembered little of all that was said. What she remembered most was the moment they kissed and, of course, the moment Eva opened the door and saw them.

Oh, Paul Sheparton was evil. And clever. So very clever. And she hated him, hated him, *hated him . . .*

Rogers read, *'Now the seeds of jealousy were deeply planted. After I left I could sit back in my room and imagine their frustrations, their bitterness, their anger. If only I might have had the good fortune to witness the scene that took place between them . . ."*

There was fury in both of them. They kept their voices low, but it was all the more terrible for that.

Eva was like some clawing, spitting, snarling animal.

"Now I understand why you

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stayed home every afternoon while I went shopping," she said.

"You understand nothing," Dora said.

"It got me out of the apartment, didn't it? So you might keep your sordid rendezvous."

Dora felt disgusted. "Oh, shut up. You don't know what you're talking about."

Eva's voice was hoarse with emotion. "How could you? After all I've done for you."

"After all you've done for me," Dora said bitterly. "Think about all the things you've done for me. All your life you've wrapped me up in your own uselessness. Protected me. Sheltered me. You were never my sister. You were always my mother. And who asked you?"

"A liar and a thief! My own sister!"

"And you're a foolish old woman."

"I detest you."

Dora couldn't take any more of it. She picked up her purse and started for the door, but Eva grabbed her arm.

"I won't let you go to Paul."

"I'll go any time I want and you won't stop me."

"My one chance for real happiness—how can you steal it away from me?"

"Let me go."

"Another woman I could understand. But my own sister—"

Dora pulled her arm away. "Oh, stop it! Open up your eyes, for heaven's sake! Paul's not in love with you. He never was. He was only being kind."

Eva's face suddenly twisted and a tremor shook her. She began to plead.

"Why take away the one bit of happiness that's ever come into my life? How much is left for me?"

"And what about me?"

Eva was beginning to cry. "But you're still young. You're prettier than I am. Dora, I beg you . . ."

"Don't beg me! I won't listen! That's all you've ever done—beg me—ever since mother died. First it was 'we need no one else, Dora. We have ourselves. Together. Always.' Then when the money became ours: 'We are self-sufficient, Dora. We can go anywhere we want, do anything we want.' Well, we went everywhere and we did everything *you* wanted to do. And with *all* our money we are *not* self-sufficient."

Eva was crying openly now. "Dora, your'e so much younger."

"And filled with fears and frustrations which *you* put into me. No more. I'm breaking away."

Eva implored. "Look at me. How much is left for me? I *am* an old woman."

But Dora shook her head. "You're asking me to make a choice. What choice? Let you have Paul and then watch myself turn into someone like you? Unmarried, unhappy, growing old with nothing to show for it?"

Half a cry of hate and half a sob of anguish burst out of Eva, and

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she was at her sister, clawing, pulling, biting. Dora grabbed Eva's wrist. There was a short struggle and Eva stumbled back to the couch where she fell face down, sobbing painfully.

Dora left the room quickly.

Rogers read, *"I did not have to witness the scene. One look at Dora's face when she came and told me was all I needed to know. The final step before the actual deed was a mere formality."*

And that final step, Dora thought, was Paul Sheparton's mistake. When she went to Paul directly after her fight with Eva, he scoffed at her fears.

"Eva wouldn't hurt you," he said.

But Dora was far too upset and finally he said he would call Eva on the phone right then and there, and talk to her. Now, of course, she realized that he must have held his finger down on the hook. But he let the phone ring presumably a few times, then hung up, turned to her, and smiled. "See?" he said. "All your worry for nothing. She's not even in." He laughed. "If we both know her, she's out buying a hat."

It was at that point he made his mistake. He gave her a gun. And gave her the same story he had given to Eva.

She put the gun in her purse and he kissed her.

"Hurry and dress," he said. "You and I are going out tonight."

She returned to the suite, opened the door, got halfway across the living room when something made her stop. She spun around and looked directly into the muzzle of a gun held in Eva's hand.

She couldn't move. She opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. Eva had a dazed look in her face.

"I'm going to kill you, Dora."

Suddenly she snapped out of it. "Where did you get that gun?"

"Paul gave it to me to protect myself. And I'm doing just that."

All the pieces fell into place in that instant.

"Didn't the phone ring just a few minutes ago?" And as Eva raised the gun, "Eva! Eva! What have we been doing to ourselves?"

Eva hesitated.

She tossed her purse to Eva. "Look inside. Go on. Open it."

Eva did and took out the gun. The dazed look in her face changed to a puzzled expression.

"Paul just gave it to me. Just now. He wanted *me* to protect myself, too."

Eva still didn't understand.

"How foolish we've been, Eva. He had us fighting each other so bitterly that you were ready to kill me. Don't you understand now?"

And slowly, slowly, Eva began to understand. "If I die, you inherit my money. If you die, I inherit yours."

"He wanted *one of us* dead," she said. "Then he'd marry either you or me."

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"While the other one stood trial for murder," Eva said. Her voice fell to a whisper. "He doesn't deserve to live."

Rogers read, *"No matter which one is killed, I'll marry the other—even in jail as she is being tried for murder. And if convicted—fine. If not, then—well, one way or another, sooner or later, I shall come into the Brampton fortune. A perfect plan. And only a unique person could accomplish it—a man without a foolish conscience, a survivor of the fittest."*

"What happened then, ladies?"

No answer.

Rogers tried desperately to be patient, then he said, "All right. You know that's as far as I can go in the diary, don't you?"

Still no answer.

"Would you rather I guessed?"

Still no answer.

"As you wish," Rogers said with a sigh. "The last entry in the book reads, *'It should happen tonight. Soon one of them will come to my door. Which one will it be?'*

He lit a cigarette, took a deep puff, then said, "Paul Sheparton was writing in his diary. That much was obvious from the way we found the book and the pen, and the position of the chair. Even a cigarette in the ashtray that had burned down. A knock must have come on the door about that time. I can just see the smile on Sheparton's face as he got up to answer it.

"But what happened to that smile when he opened the door and saw—which one of you did he see? Eva Brampton? Dora Brampton? One of you came in with a gun in your hand. One of you watched Paul Sheparton's smile turn to terror as you shot him.

"Was it one or two bullets at that time? Oh, it was Paul Sheparton's big moment all right. Murdered by one of his own guns. The question is—*which* gun? Which one of you fired from this gun?"—he picked up one gun from his desk—"Or was it from this gun?"—he picked up the other one.

"And how much later was it before the other came in? And saw Paul Sheparton already dead, then realizing what had happened and to confuse the police—which one of you shot another bullet, or bullets, into the body from the second gun?"

Rogers stared at both women. "Isn't that how it happened, ladies? Which one of you actually killed him? Which one shot him first?"

Rogers stood up as he saw the two women look at each other. He watched a small smile come to their lips. Then, slowly, he saw them reach out and join hands.

Now they faced him again.

But Rogers, looking down at their clasped hands, knew it was all over. He knew now there wasn't anything or anyone in this world to make them talk. They'd both be tried for murder together, but he wondered if there was a jury in existence anywhere that would convict them.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HERBERT CLYDE LEWIS**

TITLE: ***It Won't Be News Tomorrow***

TYPE: Crime-Suspense Story

LOCALE: A State Prison in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Pete Fallow, State Prison correspondent, had a real hunk of cheese in the electrocution of Kosky. He couldn't find a spot of color in it —and then suddenly it became the hottest story in the whole history of executions!*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU DON'T want it, Brady? Am I State Prison correspondent or ain't I? The Day City Desk tells me to give it to you at night, and now you tell me to give it to them tomorrow morning. It won't be news tomorrow. The guy's dyin' right now.

Looks like the Old Army Game to me Brady. I been your State Prison man for twenty-three years and I never once missed phonin' in a burnin'. I *know* A.P.'s covering. *I'm* A.P. up here. I'm A.P, U.P., I.N.S., U.S., N.A.N.A. but what difference does that make? If you don't gimme a break on burnings, Brady, I abdicate. There are lotsa other sheets around lookin' for a live wire State Prison man.

How do you expect me to make both ends meet if you don't take burnings? I got a wife and three kids to support. I don't expect to phone in a Damon Runyon story. I just wanna make my usual five slugs. What the hell's the newspaper business comin' to if I can't make five slugs outa a burning any more?

It *ain't* a piece o' cheese. The guy's a human being, ain't he? Is that a nice way to talk about a human being? Oh, come now, Mr. Brady; he got *more* than two paragraphs the day he killed that landlord in Chemicville. It was a *big* story up there.

That hurts, Brady. You talk like I'm tryin' to sell you a stinkbomb. Everybody who knows me knows

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Pete Fallow don't do business that way. This story's got a lot o' swell angles. Frinstince the guy—

What's that? Oh, sure the charges are reversed. What do you think I am, a millionaire? I got a wife and—

Okay, okay! I'll give it in to Stewart on the rewrite desk. And I'll make it snappy, too; don't worry about that, Mr. Brady. Gimme the head office boy to switch the call . . .

Hello, Biff? That you? This is Fallow. Hi. Say, Biff, Old Sock, why don't you come up here sometime and I'll get you in on a burning. Well, not the four guys all at once next month; too many bids to see them go. But I can fix you up for one o' the *smaller* burnings. It'll be just as good, Biff; I guarantee it. Just give me a ring the day before. Fine. I'll be expectin' you. Say, Biff, sneak me a typewriter ribbon, will you like a good feller? All-black. Mail it up to me. *Thanks.* And a dozen zipper pencils, too. I'll reciprocate, Biff.

What's gettin' into Brady these days anyway? Hey, be careful, maybe he can hear.

Gimme Stewart on the rewrite desk.

Stew? Fallow. Hi. How's the wife and kids?

I'm callin' from State Prison. Execution. Ready? . . .

Say, Stew, don't tell Brady, but just between you and me this is the biggest chunk o' limburger I ever phoned in in my twenty-three years as State Prison correspondent. All I want is a stick, Stew, so I can make my Fin.

Honest, I don't know what the execution business's comin' to when they burn guys like this.

I have wrecked my brain but cannot find a spot o' color in this, and if you know me you know this is the first time *that* happened.

Well, here goes.

The guy's name is Waldemar Kossciuhowicz. Whoa! I *know* I gotta spell it out. What a name! You can't even get a good American name in the papers any more these days. Why don't these guys go back where they came from?

Kossciuhowicz. It's pronounced just like I'm sayin' it—Koss-kee-hoe-itz—with the accent on the *hoe*. The Waldemar is with a doubleyou, and then comes the Kossciuhowicz —K for Karpis, O for Ossining, double S for Sing Sing, C for Capone . . .

All right, Stew; all right. I *ain't* tryin' to build this up.

Spell it any way you like; what the hell; it don't make no difference. Anyway, everybody up here calls him Kosky; it makes things a lot easier.

His age is twenty-nine. First degree murder, Chemicville, last September. What do you mean where is Chemicville? Why, Chemicville is the biggest village in the State. Killed his landlord with an icepick. Kosky claimed the landlord dispossessed his old lady and as a result

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she froze to death. No defense. Unmarried. No women in the case at all; not even a wife. No appeal. And so help me, Stew, Kosky didn't even ask for executive clemency.

You oughta see Kosky. A big lump of a man who ain't said two words since they shoved him into the Death House last Winter. In all my three decays up here I never saw a mug with less interest. Why, I bet you ain't even got his murder in the clips! Think o' *that!*

The only visitor he ever had was his sister. She came here this mornin' to say goodbye, but the guards tell me they didn't even talk; only held hands for a couple o' minutes and that's all.

That shows what a State Prison man you got in me, Stew. Tell this to Brady. Another reporter would o' tried to build this story up—frinstince Kosky worked in a chemical factory and there could be an angle in that; you know, killin' the landlord with chemicals, maybe—but with me the truth is the truth. I got a reputation to hold up, Stew.

Why, they din't even have to shave Kosky's head for the hot seat electrode, 'cause he turns out to be bald in just the right place.

I'll tell you something you won't believe; but it's true, take my word for it. Kosky didn't even have a last supper!

That shows what I'm up against these days. A couple o' years ago a last supper was good for five slugs with any sheet in the country. But today not only don't some sheets not want last suppers no more, but guys like Kosky come along who don't even eat 'em. What a man!

The guard asks him what he wants for last supper. "You can have everything and anything," he tells Kosky, "but I recommend the roast turkey with chestnut dressing and cranberry sauce, 'cause that's what the others usually take." And do you know what Kosky's answer is? He just shakes his head from ear to ear.

They ask him if he wants to see the Chaplain in private and he shakes his head again.

Well, Stew, in just about three minutes Kosky will be put on the hot seat.

I guess it won't make no difference to him and the rest of us, 'cause the guy's been dead from the neck up for a long, long time.

I'll hang up now, Stew, and call back with the flash when he burns.

Holy smokes what a man! Why, I bet Kosky wouldn't even make a Monday feature. I'm discouraged, Stew.

Okay, Stew, I won't hang up. I'll keep the wire open as long as you're not doin' nothin' in the big city. Say, if you want, just to pass the time, I'll give you a blow-by-blow account o' this burning.

There ain't a single newspaperman except me up here. I'm phonin' as usual from my seat of honor which took me twenty years to wangle. You remember, Stew, I showed

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it to you the time you was up here —the seat by the glass window that looks right into the execution chamber. On big executions Warden Roth shuts the window and don't let me use the phone at my elbow, on account of some of the other boys might claim special privilege. But on small burnings like this he don't care a damn.

The window's open a little and I can look right in and down on the oak electric chair fitted with that screwy plush headrest; but on account of the window is heavily glazed, none o' the bigwig politicians in the witness stand can see me. In fact, nobody except the Warden knows I'm up here lookin' down on the goings-on.

The Warden didn't have no trouble roundin' up the ten witnesses for this burning, as small as it is. Steve Blathery, the biggest and crookedest politician here in Anatomie County is present, as usual, with a bunch o' his wardheelers clingin' onto him like little barns. Blathery enjoys watchin' 'em burn. Maybe he figgers some day the tables'll be turned. Ho hum.

Father McCauley is standin' on the rubber mat in the center o' the concrete floor. The Warden's standin' in a corner lookin' tired. Burnings always make him sick. Dr. Sugar and Dr. Blint are in the other corner with their deathoscopes. Four or five guards are scattered around the room.

Here comes Kosky now! This is hot. He's comin' through the Death House door and do you know what the sign on that door says? "SILENCE." Ain't that a scream? As if you need a sign to keep Kosky quiet.

Two guards are escortin' him in, one in front and one in back, and he's comin' very quiet. There won't be no trouble with Kosky at all, Stew. Take my word for it.

Well, if you're still listenin', it'll be over in two minutes. Executioner Pettigrew has stepped away from the control board, which is at the far wall, and is dustin' off the hot seat. You oughta see Kosky glide over to that seat! There won't be no trouble . . . no trouble at all, Stew.

He's walkin' like in a dream; he's practically tiptoein' those last couple o' steps to the hot seat like he was scared o' disturbin' his own last thoughts. Father McCauley starts comin' over to him, but Kosky shakes his head and waves the priest away. A strange lunkhead Kosky is, Stew. You oughta see the smile . . . a happy smile like he was glad the fatal moment has come

Pettigrew has just pushed Kosky down onto the hot seat, and Kosky acts a little scared when Old Pet touches him. But he sits down all right without makin' no demonstration. Old Pet has stepped back and I can see the two guards fasten' the leg electrodes on poor Kosky. The headrest'll be on him in an-

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other minute. You know, Stew, I actually feel sorry for Kosky . . . he's so helpless. Just a big hunk o'-flesh and bones without no brains.

Why do guys who can't afford good lawyers go around killin' people? Well, ain't no use feelin' sorry for him now. Old Pet is walkin' over to put the black mask over Kosky's face and in just one more . . .

Holy smokes! *HOLY SMOKES!* Stew, Stew, Stew! . . .

Stew, for Pete's sake stop the presses! Have Brady listen in on the extension! Get ready to replate! Holy smokes! What a story! *AND I GOT IT EXCLUSIVE!*

Hello, *hello, HELLO!*

Fallow? This is Brady. What's the matter? Speak up. What's happened? *WHAT!*

Kosky . . . swallowed dynamite!

What do you mean? Are you nuts? How can a man swallow dynamite? Not dynamite, eh? Fulminate of mercury, you say. *FULMINATE OF MERCURY!*

Wow! *Is* that a powerful explosive? You're damn right it's powerful. It's the most powerful they make.

Oh boy what a yarn! Fallow, if you're horsing us up I'll have you deported. Now hang right on this wire. Stew! Take everything Fallow's got . . . a running story.

Boy! Run into the composing room—tell the makeup to be ready to replate.

Boy! Get the managing editor. Tell him to hurry in here! Tell him a guy on the electric chair has swallowed a cylinder of double dynamite.

Tell him the guy has just told the Warden if they turn on the juice he's gonna *EXPLODE* and blow everybody straight to hell!

Stew? Fallow. Lemme catch my breath. Now in the first place yell over and tell Brady I'll give you this exclusive for one hundred fish. Not a penny less. If he tries to bargain I'll hang up and call the opposition . . . he says okay, eh? Well, well, that's fast work! Tell him he better not double-cross me.

Now listen, Stew, and take down every word. Clamp on your earphones tight.

Everything is runnin' smooth in the execution chamber. The witnesses are sittin' quiet. Father McCauley is movin' his lips in prayer. And Old Pet walks over to put the black mask on Kosky's face.

Suddenly Kosky raises his right hand very slow and looks at the Warden.

"Pardon me for troublin' you, Warden," Kosky says very slow, "But I gotta say a few words."

Everybody stirs uneasy—'specially Steve Blathery and the wardheelers in the witness stand. But it don't make me worry 'cause I have seen these mugs askin' to make farewell speeches many times before. Only it sort o' shocks me to see Kosky really knows how to talk.

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You know how the Warden is about these last requests. He likes to be nice. So he looks at Kosky and says, "All right, say what you want; but make it snappy."

And then Kosky says it. Very slow a nice fat smile spreads all over his face, and he takes his time before he starts in talkin'.

"Warden," Kosky says, "you think I am just a Hunky without no brains. Well, you are wrong. I happen to be Dr. Waldemar Kossciuhowicz, Bachelor o' Science from the University o' Lodz. And I also happen," Kosky drones, "like everybody else who graduates from the famous University o' Lodz, to be an expert chemist and engineer."

And he looks around the room and boy, Stew, are those small-time politicians turnin' green in the face.

"Now what I want to say," Kosky goes on, after a nice big pause—and get down every word o' this, Stew, 'cause it's hot—"is that just before comin' in to the death chamber I have swallowed a sealed cylinder."

Now he starts pronouncin' his words very even, and by this time you can use Steve Blathery's face for a traffic light.

"This cylinder," Kosky yawns, "contains fulminate o' mercury—the most powerful explosive in the world—ten times more terrific than T.N.T. And it contains *enough* fulminate o' mercury to blow up me, and you, and everybody else *in* this room and *near* this room for t'ree hundred yards around. The cylinder is the size o' my thumb," Kosky says, holdin' up his big thumb very slow to the amazed audience, "and is cleverly built with a detonating cap so that any sudden or violent *MUSCULAR* movement will cause the necessary spark to explode it. *Like frinstince,*" Kosky says, "the muscular spasm caused by electrocution! So," Kosky smiles, "everybody please sit or stand exactly where you are, because if anybody makes the slightest move I'm gonna hiccough and knock the walls down!"

That is what Kosky says, Stew, word for word, and then he shuts his mouth very slow and a terrible silence falls over the Death Chamber that is broken only by one o' the wardheelers fallin' on the floor in a dead faint.

Kosky just sits there on the hot seat, grinnin' very funny, with that bald spot on top of his head shinin' like a moon in the water. Old Pet, the mask in his hand, stands a few feet away, his mouth wide open and his eyes glassy. All the witnesses hunch up in their seats. The guards stand with their beefy hands straight down at their sides. Dr. Sugar blinks his eyes and Dr. Blint bites his lips. The Warden turns pale and grim and Father McCauley stops prayin' and just stands there, his hands clasped over his chest.

The Warden finally breaks the silence. His voice is very husky. "You can't get away with this,

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Kosky," he says in disgust. "Do you think we're all crazy fools?"

A murmur o' voices starts risin' from Old Pet, the guards, and the witnesses. But Kosky just raises his right hand like he is sippin' tea at the Vanderbilts, and the noise stops.

Kosky looks all around the room. "I don't think you're crazy," Kosky says. "I think you're all very smart men—and that's why I know you know I'm not lyin'."

The Warden takes a step forward. I never saw his eyes so hard, Stew.

"Kosky," he says, "you picked the wrong Warden to pull this trick on. Because when I was a youth I worked in a construction camp—and I happened to be the powder monkey. So I know everything there is to know about explosives. And I know that what you claim you done won't work, even if you did do it, and anyway I think you're lyin'."

"That's a matter of opinion," Kosky says, very cool, "and the Lord knows every man is entitled to his opinion"—pipe that for gall, Stew!—"So if you think I'm lyin' or I won't blow up if I ain't lyin', go right ahead and electrocute me. I'll let Mr. Pettigrew move around for that, though I'm warnin' you nobody else make the slightest move or you'll find out soon enough I ain't lyin'. The second Mr. Pettigrew pulls the switch you'll all know who was right and who was wrong."

There is another dead silence after these words. But the Warden just can't keep his mouth shut; it's too much for him.

"I know all about fulminate o' mercury," he says. "It's what we used in detonating caps to explode dynamite. And damn right it's a powerful explosive. But—it's absolutely harmless unless a spark hits it, and how are you gonna create a spark in the middle o' your stomach?"

Kosky smiles again. "Very simple, Warden. There's a tiny coil inside that cylinder that is held in place by a little rod. Now any harsh muscular movement will jolt that rod and unspring the coil—against a little contraption that works like a cigarette lighter."

"Cigarette lighter!" Steve Blathery rises all of a sudden, shriekin' like a madman. But Kosky just puts up his hand and Blathery is quiet again; only there is a weak look in his eyes.

"I guess," the Warden says to Kosky, "you expect us to believe the cigarette lighter gadget will create the spark to set off the explosive—in the middle o' your stomach where there ain't no air?"

"Oh, there's air all right," Kosky says. "It's a sealed cylinder and there's enough air inside to feed the spark. The watchmaker who made the cylinder for me tested it and it worked fine."

"I guess," the Warden says sarcastically, "they teach watchmaking, too, at the University of Lodz."

"I should say they do," Kosky

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says. "That's one o' their best courses."

"And you swallowed that big cylinder," the Warden says heatedly, "containin' the explosive and the coil and the rod and the little cigarette lighter all at once down your own throat. Ha! Tell me another."

"Well, it wasn't very big," Kosky says. "Not for me, anyway, 'cause over at the University of Lodz we don't play baseball or football or anything like that, but we do have a lot o' fun practicin' sword swallowin'. Anyway," Kosky goes on, "I doused the cylinder in a lot o' butter, and it went down nice and easy."

"Holy smokes!" a guard suddenly pops out. "He did use a lot o' butter! All he ordered for lunch was bread and butter, and I brought it to him, only he didn't eat any o' the bread."

Kosky suddenly puts the palm of his hand very slow over his stomach and presses in a little—very gently. "Why, I can feel it," he says like he is in a dream; and then he turns to the Warden. "Come over. I'll give you a feel . . ."

Steve Blathery is on his feet and his head almost hits the ceiling "Let me out o' here!" he shrieks.

"Shut up!" Kosky shrieks right back. "Yellin' like that puts me right on the edge o' blowin' up."

Blathery sinks back into his seat, lookin' more dead than alive. And then Kosky starts laughin', Stew, and you oughta see everybody duck! he's laughin' now—long, loud peals o' laughter; only he's managin' not to shake his sides too much —I hope.

Fallow? This is Brady.

What a man, Fallow! Not you—I mean Kosky. Now you stay right where you are because . . . What! What do you mean you're scared? What kind of a newspaperman are you to be scared at a time like this? Am *I* scared? Is Stewart scared? Are you yellow, man?

How would you like your kids to go around hearing other kids chanting their old man is yellow? So what if the walls *do* fall down on top of you? You'll be dying with your boots on, won't you? Is there a more glorious way of dying than with your boots on? Well, I have no time to argue about that now. I'll send the check to your wife in case you die. *You'll haunt me if I don't?* Is that a nice thing to say? Did *I* ever go back on my word?

Now look, Fallow. You gotta keep Kosky in the Death Chamber for a couple of minutes. I want a personal interview. I want pictures. Find out about the sister. Did she smuggle in the cylinder? Find out who made the cylinder. Where did he get the idea of doing this? Find out if he's in love.

Don't think we're letting you down on our end. I've got the wires burning. We're looking up all the clips and all the encyclopedias on explosives. We're contacting the head of the Bureau of Combusti-

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bles. We're getting in touch with the research head of the American Explosives Company. We're looking up all we can find out about the University of Lodz. I never heard of it before.

Now you yell right down to Kosky and tell him you want that interview. What do you mean you won't do it? *Do it!* What do you think we're paying you fifty dollars for?

All right, Fallow, a hundred dollars. I made a mistake . . . slip of the tongue.

WHAT!

Kosky's getting off the hot seat! He's unstrapping the leg electrodes! He's standing up!

Wow!

Stop—the—presses. Another ray-pleat . . . another plea-rate . . . another replate!

Hello, Stew? What the hell's the matter with Brady? He's talkin' tongue-tied Ouch! Who's foolin' around with this phone?

Oh, you're still on the extension, Mr. Brady. Pardon me . . .

Stew? Where did I leave Kosky last time I spoke to you? He was laughin', eh? That's right. Then he stops laughin' and just looks around and everybody is quiet again.

Now get this picture: Warden Roth shoves his jaw forward a full two inches and glares at Kosky.

"This is all a good gag, Kosky," the Warden says, "and I'm glad to see you're enjoyin' yourself so much at our expense."

Then the Warden looks at Old Pet, who is just standin' there with his mouth wide open

"Go on with the execution, Pettigrew," the Warden says in a very low voice.

"Yes, sir," Old Pet says. He looks at the Warden and grins. "In my opinion, sir," Old Pet says, "this man is bluffing. In all my experience I never hard of such a fantastic thing."

Well, Stew, Old Pet is prejudiced; he makes one hundred and fifty fish for the job, and I can see where he don't want to lose it. I hear he just bought a new car. Don't ask me, Stew, if Kosky is bluffin'. And I don't know if he *can* blow us to hell even if he did swallow the cylinder. I ain't an editorial writer; I'm a reporter.

The silence now is much worse than before. Warden Roth glares at two of the guards. "Stand on each side of him," he says.

They go over and stand on each side of Kosky. Old Pet walks over and holds out the black mask. You ought to see the smile on Kosky's puss now. A beautiful smile, a lovely smile!

"Excuse me," Kosky says, "but I have heard the black mask is optional. Is that so?"

"Yes!" The Warden howls. "Yes! Pettigrew—damn the mask. Hurry it up!"

Kosky's smile grows bigger and prettier. "You see—" he says in a very clear voice, lookin' around the

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room—"you see, I don't want the mask because when I blow up I want my eyes to pop out like machine-gun bullets." And then he starts laughin', very quiet, all inside, but you can see what a good time he's havin'.

Old Pet slips on the chin strap that holds the electrode on his head. The laugh stops but the smile remains. All of us act like we're sittin' on hot coals. Kosky is silent, his eyes shinin' like rhinestones.

"All right," the Warden says between his teeth. "Pettigrew, hurry up over to the control board and thud that switch!"

Old Pet looks at Kosky and shakes his head, maybe in admiration at the guy. Kosky sits there very cocksure. Then Old Pet goes over to the control board. He walks very slow, 'cause somehow everybody is in a daze and you just can't do things fast in that death chamber.

He finally arrives and you can see him monkeyin' around with that switch. "Pretty soon," we all are thinkin'—pretty soon we'll know whether Kosky is the greatest liar the world ever saw or the smartest hombre that ever honored the hot seat."

Then, so help me, Stew, Kosky starts puffin' out his cheeks. I never seen anything like this before in my life! He puffs 'em out farer than you'd believe, and to the witnesses, the Warden, the guards, the doctors, and Father McCauley he looks like the world's biggest bomb achin' to explode.

That cinches it. Steve Blathery is off his bench in a jiffy, wavin' his hands and shriekin' like a madman. "No, no!" he yells. "For God sakes don't pull the switch!" His hair on end, his fingers clawed like a gorilla, he jumps over the rail and tries to rush over to the control board. The suspense is so terrific that several more o' the boys in the witness stand faint. I bet there ain't an ounce o' blood above the necks of everybody at this moment as Blathery hotfoots for the control board shoutin', "Don't pull the switch! He'll blow up! I *know it!* The man's mad and he's tellin' the truth!"

The sight of all this disorder in the death house is too much for Warden Roth. At first he looks at Blathery in amazement, as if he can't believe his own eyes, but when he sees Blathery racin' for the control board he loses his temper. The Warden makes a football dive for Blathery. Both of 'em land on the floor in front o' the hot seat, where Kosky is sittin' chucklin' to himself.

Poor Warden Roth! I seen the same thing happen in many a football game—Blathery only lands on his shoulders and ain't hurt at all. But the Warden, who did the tacklin', is not so lucky, and that hollow sound maybe you heard in the phone a minute back was the Warden knockin' his head against the cement floor.

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He's out cold.

No, Stew, Old Pet didn't jam the switch. He sees the commotion and comes tearin' over and when he spots the Warden lyin' out cold on the floor somethin' snaps in Old Pet's mind. He sticks out his tongue and just sits down on the floor, too dazed for words.

Then Blathery gets up on his hands and knees, and finally he manages to stand on his dogs, though he's very unsteady, like when he's drinkin'. I can't tell you how thunderstruck everybody is; like the whole world is fallin' down around their ears.

Dr. Blint finds his tongue. "Mr. Blathery!" the doc says. "This is unheard of, preposterous, rediculous. We must go on with the electrocution!"

"Dr. Blint!" Blathery yells. "Let me remind you I'm head of this county. And let me tell you," he says, lookin' at the guards especially, "all of you owe your jobs to me—and if a single one of you don't do what I order, you won't have jobs tomorrow—"

"If you are here to *have* jobs tomorrow," Kosky suddenly says, which is his first remark in many minutes, and everybody just keeps quiet and looks at him.

Then, very slow but very sure, Kosky bends over and starts unstrappin' his leg electrodes, and not one of the guards makes the slightest move to stop him. He works as if he has all the time in the world, and finally he gets 'em off and wiggles off the hot seat and stands up like a lazy man wakin' up in the morning.

FLASH! Kosky just hotfooted out o' the death chamber! He escaped. And he took Steve Blathery along with him as hostage!

Fallow, it can't be true. It can't. Sure this is Brady. Who the hell did you think it was?

I say it can't be true. I just spoke to Dr. Fullerton, head of the American Explosives Company. He says a man can't explode!

No, Fallow, he's not absolutely certain. He said it never has been done before. I told him Kosky invented a new kind of deadly machine. He says he'd like to see it. I told him we can't arrange it—

Wait a minute. Hold on Fallow. Wow! One of the boys just got Chief Bentley of the Bureau of Combustibles. Bentley says even if all the fulminate of mercury in the world exploded inside a man's stomach it wouldn't do much damage because the body would muffle the explosion. Yeah, Fallow, Bentley says the fulminate of mercury would only "pothole" and though Kosky would be a mess on the floor nobody would get hurt. He never could knock the walls down; he couldn't even shake the walls!

What a man! What a MAN! Good old Kosky! Hope he makes it!

Stew? Fallow. Yeah, he's gone. And it looks like he won't come back.

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Here's the picture: Kosky gets off the hot seat and walks over and grabs Blathery by the scruff of his neck. You ought to see Blathery squirm. It did my heart good. The Warden is still out cold, so he ain't no use at all, and all the others are standin' there, 'cause Blathery holds the power o' life and death over their jobs, and they damn well know it.

"Mr. Blathery," Kosky said in a very gentle voice—and ain't it surprisin' that he knows Blathery's name?—"Mr. Blathery," he says, "you're my friend, ain't you?"

You ought to see the smile creep over Blathery's map. He lights up, Stew, like a Roman Candle.

"Why, Kosky," he howls, "Kosky! Of course I'm your friend! You know that."

"Well," Kosky says, "that's fine. Because," he adds, "you and me are goin' for a little walk together right this minute, and if you come gentle and do what I tell you I ain't gonna harm a hair on your head."

By this time the witnesses still awake are bitin' their lips or their knuckles, and Old Pet, the guards, the doctors, and the Chaplain are either numb or dumb.

"However," Kosky continues, as Blathery tries to remove his neck from Kosky's hand, "however, if you act the slightest bit like you wasn't going to do exactly what I tell you, or if any of the men in this room try to follow us, or if anybody gives an alarm so that people outside starts shootin' at me, I am afraid I am going to suddenly get a severe attack of stomach cramps. And you know what that means," Kosky says sharp-like, givin' Blathery's collar a little extra tug.

Stew, Blathery at this moment looks more like a ghost than a ghost itself. He is barely able to talk. And all he can say is this: "Kosky," he says, "you can't do that to me. You can't! Why, I'm the boss of Anatomie County! Let me go, Kosky, and I'll get you a reprieve! You won't even have to stay in jail. I'll give you a job at the social club—anything you want."

Kosky's answer is: "Get movin'."

And very gently he shoves Blathery forward.

Well, Stew, I ain't capable, I guess of describin' the rest. Just before Blathery reaches the door he manages to turn his head. Tears are in his eyes, for the first time in his life, probably.

"You heard what he said, boys," Blathery says to us. "And all I can say is that if anybody gives Kosky the slightest cause to explode he might as well leave Anatomie County, but even that won't do no good, because my six brothers will trail the skunk to the ends of the earth and catch up with him some day. Goodbye, boys," Blathery slobbers, "and remember, that if anything happens to me, I'm a martyr to the cause of human kind."

"Come on," Kosky says, "and stop beefin'."

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Then Kosky gives him a soft little shove and both of 'em march out of that door marked: "SILENCE."

That's exactly what we've been havin' for the last three minutes, Stew; except for the Warden. The Warden is still layin' on the floor moanin', but everybody is so scared to move that not even the doctors have gone over to see how he is. I bet the perspiration in the death house is enough to float a cruiser.

FLASH! Stop the presses! Here comes Blathery now—alone!

Kosky stole his pants!

Whoopee! Who'd o' ever thought Steve Blathery wears green and purple underwear?

Everybody's yellin' and excited, Stew, and I can't get very clear what happened. The Warden is sittin' up and rubbin' his neck.

FLASH! Kosky escaped in an auto! He made Blathery walk him out o' the prison. He made Blathery smile very nice every time they passed anybody. He walked Blathery half a block outside the prison. A car was waitin' down the block with a woman at the wheel. Kosky got in, made Blathery remove his trousers —yip-eee!—and then without a word sped away in the car.

Blathery is yellin' now for somebody to lend him a pair o' pants but nobody seems willin' to do it. What a man! The Warden looks like he's gonna sock Blathery in the jaw. Wow! Ouch. He *did!* Blathery don't need pants now—get him a stretcher.

Oh my poor heart!

Fallow? This is Brady. Here's something. The office boy just looked up the University of Lodz in the Encyclopedia.

It doesn't say anything about them teaching chemistry there, or engineering, or watchmaking, or sword swallowing. But it does say this:

"Lodz: University of: A small university in Europe—is famous for its courses in advanced psychology."

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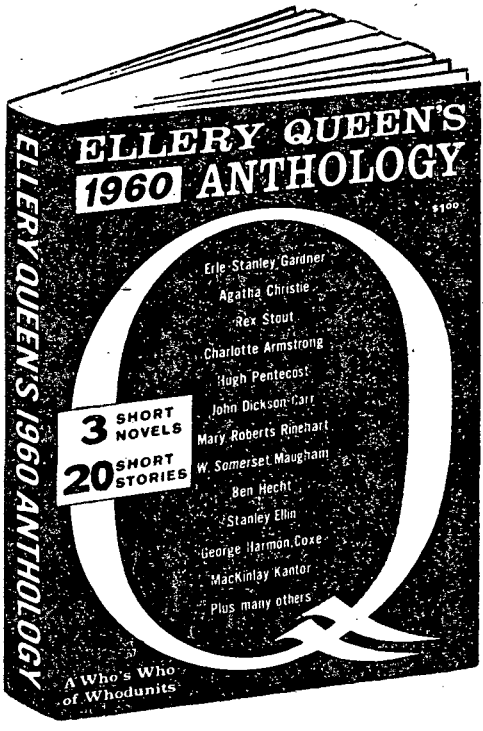

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AUTHOR: **E. X. FERRARS**

TITLE: ***Playing With Fire***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Bardley, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It started with a 5-year-old boy foolishly playing with matches. It developed, with a curious inevitability, into an all-consuming domestic tragedy . . .*

THE STRANGE THING IS THAT when Sidney Sankey taught Roddie Bourne to play with matches it was done without the least intention of harm, either to the child or to anyone else. If a destructive element in Sankey's nature revealed itself in the ideas he had of playthings suitable for a child of five, he himself was unaware of it. Indeed, the instruction of Roddie in this perilous entertainment was probably as innocent an action as Sankey ever performed, for it occurred during the time of extraordinary happiness for him in his friendship with Roddie and Roddie's family.

When Sankey first met them, the Bournes, like him were newcomers to the small midland town of Bardley. Oliver Bourne, thirty-eight, had been in the infantry throughout the war and had been teaching boys for ten years before he arrived in Bardley; he had come to Bardley as senior history master to the school where Sidney Sankey had just been given the first, and as it turned out, the only job he was ever to have, teaching a little of practically everything to the younger boys.

The friendship, which began as one between Sankey and Bourne, caused surprise in their colleagues, for the two men had almost nothing in common. Bourne was a quiet but ambitious man, brusque

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and strong-willed, who took a somewhat arrogant pride in his work and his power over his pupils. Sankey was excitable and voluble but timid, with a fear of the boys whom he had to teach—a fear which was immediately recognized by them and ferociously exploited. He had become a schoolmaster only because he had been unable to think of anything else that he might do better, and for this he despised himself and the whole profession of teaching, and hated the boys. That both he and Bourne were strangers in Bardley was at first the only thing that drew them together. Later, however, there was Mary Bourne. And there was also Roddie.

Without Roddie the situation could never have developed. Mary Bourne was lonely and bored in the unfamiliar town. She had gone to it reluctantly from a small market-town in Somerset only for the sake of the extra money, which would help with Roddie and perhaps make it possible for her to have a second child. She had taken an instant dislike to Bardley, feeling personally outraged at sight of the blackened walls of its buildings, of the specks of soot that settled each day on the window sills of her home, of its drab little rectangle of garden, of the squealing trams on which she had to ride whenever she went to the shops.

But she was as fond of her husband as she had ever been, and had no thought of solving the problem of her boredom by a love affair with another man. If Sidney Sankey, therefore, had started his visits merely for the sake of seeing her when Oliver Bourne was absent, it is unlikely that she would ever have allowed the visits to become more and more frequent. But Sankey always came to see Roddie.

That he visited Roddie surprisingly often when Bourne was kept late at the school by a committee meeting, or other business of which a junior master was free, ought to have aroused Mary's suspicions. But she was not particularly vain and not at all perspicacious, and though she was only five years older than Sankey, there was something about him which made her think of him as nearer to Roddie's age than to hers.

In spite of his fear and hatred of adolescent boys, Sankey sincerely delighted in the company of the very young and had a surprising talent for amusing them. Often Mary left him to play with Roddie in the sitting-room while she cooked the supper in the kitchen and Roddie's shouts of pleasure and Sankey's softer laughter, as they played some game that Sankey had just invented helped to delude Mary that it was only for mothering that he came to her, and to feel the warmth of a home instead of the chill of his lodgings.

She still clung to this delusion even after she realized that for the

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first time since she had married Oliver, her husband was seriously jealous.

His jealousy first flared up on the evening when he found Roddie playing with matches. Coming home just after Sankey had left the house, Oliver Bourne found his son kneeling on the hearthrug near a blazing fire, with several match boxes emptied onto the rug before him. He was using the matches to build a little village of log cabins. For his age Roddie was deft with his hands and he had been well instructed. The tiny log cabins were neat, square, well balanced and well roofed, and he had every reason to be proud of them. But the matches were not even safety matches.

The sight gave Bourne the excuse to lose his temper—the excuse he had been wanting far more than he realized.

He gave a shout. "Mary, come here!"

She was in the kitchen, in the middle of one of those operations at the stove that cannot possibly be interrupted.

She called back, "In a minute."

"Come at once!" Bourne yelled. "Come and see what your child's doing!"

His voice, the sheer rage in it, brought a protesting wail from Roddie. Mary came running from the kitchen. Her face, which was a softly pretty one, with rather plump cheeks and big, mild, gray eyes, was flushed from the heat of the cooking stove, but she grew pale as she took in the scene before her.

Before she could speak, Bourne said furiously, "Didn't you *know* he was doing this?"

Without answering him, Mary dropped to her knees beside Roddie and scooped the matches into her apron. It was a foolish thing to do, for it made Roddie, who did not in the least understand what he had been doing wrong start screaming, with disappointment. But the sight of the child with all those matches so near the fire had momentarily filled Mary with blind terror. Besides she was not accustomed to Oliver in this kind of rage.

He was standing rigidly at the edge of the hearthrug, ignoring Roddie, fixing his bright, angry stare on Mary's face. He was a short man, with thick, powerful shoulders, a thick neck and a big head, a heavy forehead and a square, heavy chin.

"How long has he been at it?" he demanded. "How long is it since you troubled to find out what he was doing? And where's the fire screen?"

The fire screen was where he could see it, in a corner of the room. Supposing that he knew this, Mary answered a question that he had not asked.

"Sidney must have forgotten to put it back," she said. "He was here with Roddie until a minute or two ago. He's only just gone."

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"Sidney's good at forgetting a lot of things, but never the time when I'm expected home," Bourne said in a voice that shook with the violence of his feelings. "And while he's here you forget all about Roddie."

Aghast, returning her husband's stare with blank bewilderment, Mary's face flushed as swiftly as a moment before it had lost its color. In all the years of her marriage it had never occurred to her that Oliver could ever say such a thing to her.

Seeing this, his face also reddened, and with a shrug that was halfway an apology he went to fetch the fire screen and placed it in front of the fire. But then, because the screen was seldom left there unless Roddie was alone in the room, Bourne removed it again and put it back in the corner, muttering confusedly as he did so, "The man must be crazy, doing a thing like that! Anyway, where did all those matches come from?"

"He must have brought them himself," Mary said. She was still kneeling on the hearthrug, with the matches heaped in her apron, while Roddie stamped and cried before her. "He didn't mean any harm by it."

Bourne was now beginning to feel hot with embarrassment at the feelings which he had allowed himself to show, and because of this he appeared to accept what Mary had said with a readiness that was far from sincere. The harmlessness of Sidney Sankey was something in which Oliver Bourne never believed again; but he was too angry with himself for his self-betrayal to say so.

"Well, that's a change at least," he said and managed a short laugh. "He usually pockets things. It's become the hardest thing in the world to keep cigarettes in the house since he's taken to coming here. And matches were becoming practically extinct."

"He's always bringing things for Roddie," Mary said as she stood up and went to the door.

"Mary . . ." Bourne began.

She paused in the doorway.

"Mary, what I said just now . . ."

"I've forgotten it," she said distantly as she went back to the kitchen, where a good piece of steak had had time to overcook and the potatoes had boiled to a pulp.

Instead of attending to this now, Mary stood in the middle of the kitchen looking down at the matches in her apron. She had not forgotten Oliver's words. In fact, she was only just beginning to feel the full shock of the anger that they had caused in her. As she felt it, she also felt for the first time—in a way that startled her—that Sidney Sankey was intensely important to her.

It was not, she assured herself quickly, that she was in love with him. Wasn't she years older than he was? Wasn't she happily married?

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And weren't they all nice people—she, Sidney, and Oliver?

But still, she stood there alone in the kitchen, aware from their voices in the sitting-room that Oliver, in his brusque way, was now comforting Roddie, promising him that if it mattered so much to him he should have matches to play with, only matches that wouldn't be dangerous, there sprang to life in Mary a sense of Sidney as someone whom she could not bear to do without. For a long, bleak moment it seemed to her that if she took heed of Oliver's jealousy, if she stopped Sidney's visits, there would be nothing left for her in this grim town, where she had no other friends—nothing but its blackness and the specks of soot that eternally settled on the window sills and the hideout rams that went squealing past.

But that she felt this so strongly frightened her, and as soon as she had recognized the feeling, she decided frantically that Sidney's visits must stop.

It was one of the causes of the disaster that was to follow that Mary's mind all too often worked in this way. Just as her panic on seeing Roddie playing with matches had made her snatch them away without giving herself time to think of what this might do to Roddie, so her panic on realizing how important Sankey's visits had become to her made her blindly determine to deny herself those visits —without first trying to find out what those visits meant either to Sankey or to her husband.

When a few days later she nerved herself to the point of telling Sankey that he must not come to the house so often—indeed, should not come at all unless Oliver invited him—she was so bemused by the sense of her own loss that although she noticed the flash of something strange in Sankey's eyes, she did not recognize it as a warning.

She and Sankey were facing each other in the chairs on each side of the fireplace, with Roddie, engaged on an ambitious building project with the safety matches that his father had given him, on the hearthrug between them. She had begun by telling Sidney of Oliver's anger on finding Roddie playing with matches, then she had spoken less directly of Oliver's jealousy. The cowardice in her nature had made her choose to play her little scene when Roddie was there, for the boy's presence gave her an excuse to speak evasively and the right to expect Sidney to do the same. Laughing at Oliver for being so ridiculous as to be jealous, she asked Sankey if he did not agree with her that however ridiculous one's husband might sometimes be, one ought not, if one cared for him, to let him feel unhappy.

It was then that she saw that strange blaze in Sankey's eyes. But it was followed at once by a look so

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vague and blank that Mary started to wonder if he was really listening to her. He was often abstracted, given to long silences which sometimes even Roddie found odd, while at other times he was so talkative that no one else could get a word in. The changes on his thin face, with the slightly prominent, dark eyes, the long, sharp nose and the small, lopsided mouth, matched these changes in his mood. In a mood of animation his expression had a gay, vivid, curiously innocent quality which gave him a kind of good looks; but in one of his withdrawn moods the look that settled on his face was dull, sullen, and unattractive.

It was with such a look now and only a slight, unusual mottling of his face that he continued to gaze at Mary as she went on.

"I think perhaps it's just because he's generally worried and worn out," she said. "I mean, it isn't really like Oliver to act as he did. And that's why I'm more worried than I would be if—well, if he was really that sort of person. I mean, I know he's found this new job a strain, and he's tired and keeps having headaches. And so I'm really anxious that he shouldn't have the chance to upset himself over anything so silly. You understand?"

She hardly knew that she was being dishonest. But Sankey knew it. He was exceedingly sensitive to the feelings of others, even if his interpretation of what he perceived was often distorted. He knew now that Mary was concerned not for her husband's peace of mind but for her own. She was thinking only of herself, not of Oliver and of course, not of Sidney Sankey.

As he still did not answer, Mary said nervously, "Sidney, you do agree with me, don't you? You do understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand," he answered absently, staring straight through Mary at some dim images that had begun to form at the shadowy edges of his mind. "I'm usually quite understanding."

"Oh, you are," Mary said. "That's why I knew that I could talk to you about it all."

"But I'll miss you—and Roddie. At first."

Sankey looked down at Roddie and frowned slightly. They looked so alike, Roddie and his mother, with their round, soft faces gray-eyes, and soft, fair hair, that it had felt natural to love them both with the same love, as if they were still part of one another. Playing with Roddie, feeling happy at the warmth of the child's response to him, Sankey had felt as if this response were Mary's too, as if it were merely by some accident that the arm that had slid round his neck was Roddie's and not hers, that the eager breath on his cheek was the little boy's and not the woman's.

A mistake, of course. A very foolish mistake.

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Stooping down, Sankey put out a finger and gave a sharp jab at Roddie's latest and largest log cabin. The matches toppled over in a heap.

Mary gave a little cry. "Oh, why did you do that?"

"Why do we do any of the things we do?" Sankey asked as he stood upright again and went to the door.

Mary did not follow him to see him out, for as she looked at the heap of matches on the hearthrug and at Roddie's bewildered face above them, suddenly, for the first time, she was frightened of something—something that was in Sidney Sankey and not in herself.

She tried to shake off this fear, yet it stayed with her throughout the evening. Oliver Bourne, coming in presently, saw that something was wrong. But he saw also that a packet of cigarettes he had left on the mantelpiece had disappeared. This meant that Sankey had been there, and because of the rage that always overcame him now whenever he thought of Sankey, Bourne did not trust himself to ask Mary what had happened.

Sankey that evening walked all the way back to his lodgings instead of taking the tram. A thin mist of rain was falling. In the light of the street lamps the pavements had a slimy sheen. The air felt like a sodden blanket wrapped around him, clinging to his thin body with a chill that started him shivering fiercely.

He turned up the collar of his coat, sank his head between his shoulders, buried his hands in his pockets, but did not think of walking faster. With his gaze sliding along unseeingly over the muddily gleaming paving-stones and oily puddles, he strolled along, chewing his lower lip and sometimes suddeny whistling a half bar of music.

But when he arrived at his lodgings he was jolted out of his abstraction by the discovery that he had no matches in his pocket with which to light the gas fire in his room. He had only a packet of cigarettes which he did not remember having bought. A few days ago he had bought half a dozen boxes of matches, but he had left them all in the Bournes' house. Now he would have to go downstairs and ask his landlady to help him out. At the thought he flung himself on the bed in the cold room, clutching his head and pouring out frantic childish curses, of a kind that he thought he had forgotten until this moment of despair . . .

During the next few weeks Sankey thought a great deal about Mary Bourne. When he met Oliver in the school, the two men scarcely spoke to each other. But Sankey was very much on Bourne's mind. Though he had never discussed the matter with Mary, Oliver knew that the scene he had made had driven her to tell Sankey to stay away from the house. That she had done this had been a great relief to

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Bourne, yet whenever he passed Sankey in the corridors of the school building, or saw him in the staff commonroom—saw the unhealthy blotching of his sullen face and the way his dark eyes evaded his own—an uneasy conviction developed in Bourne's mind that he and Mary were not at the end of their troubles with Sidney Sankey.

Among the other masters it was generally said that Sankey would never last the year out. He was too inefficient, too helpless with the boys. But the year, what was left of it, often seemed to Bourne a long time, too long to be endured without taking action of some sort. Only he did not know just what action. And really there seemed to be nothing that he could do about Sankey except to leave him alone.

To have left him alone, to have continued leaving him alone would have been by far the safest course for the Bournes to pursue—the safest course for themselves and the safest for Sankey. He was almost intolerably unhappy at the school, suffering badly from sleeplessness and eating so little that even his indifferent landlady had begun to worry about him. But the image of Mary was fading from his mind.

He had almost managed to blot out of his memory the sweetness of the evenings he had spent playing with Roddie while Mary went ahead with her cooking, calling out to them occasionally from the kitchen, her voice intimate and gay. If he gave a thought to the few occasions when he had been alone with her, it was no longer to think of her as tender and desirable, but as really rather insipid. At the same time, when now and then he tried his hardest to make his first clear anger against her, that confident, humiliated hatred, blaze up as fiercely as at first, the flames required a tiresome amount of stoking. So if Mary had not happened to meet him in the town one Saturday afternoon and invite him to go home with her for tea, there need have been no tragedy.

Mary gave him the invitation because her own feelings about him had completely changed. She was far happier than she had been during those first weeks in Bardley, because she now had plenty of friends. There was the wife of one of the other schoolmasters, who had a little boy of Roddie's age and whom Mary saw nearly every day. There were her next-door neighbors, a middle-aged couple who had begun an acquaintanceship cautiously by commenting on the weather over the garden wall, but with whom Mary and Oliver now spent frequent evenings, eating large quantities of homemade cake and being instructed in local politics. There were the members of a choral society to which Mary had been introduced.

In this altered situation, Mary knew that she had no reason to fear

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the strength of her own feelings for Sidney Sankey, and on catching sight of him, as usual alone, looking idly into a shop window, she thought only that she had really been extraordinarily unkind to him and that it would be pleasant—it would be a burden off her conscience—to make it up to him now by asking him to tea.

She did not notice that he started to tremble when she spoke to him, and the hoarseness of his voice when he answered her only made her think that he had a cold and hope that he would not give it to Roddie.

His answer was a confused excuse for not having tea with her, yet he started to walk along beside her and Mary had no doubt that he was pleased and grateful. His failure to give any answer at all to what she said next, and the way that he avoided looking at her, did not seem particularly strange. Hadn't he always gone in for these trance-like silences?

At home she talked for both of them, apologizing cheerfully because it was so long since they had seen one another, because she had nothing special in the way of sweets, and because Roddie was showing so little interest in his old friend.

"It isn't that he's forgotten you, it's just that he's shy," she said. "He's always talked about you a lot and he keeps making us play those games you taught him."

Roddie looked up at his mother with a little frown. Of course he had not forgotten Sidney, but he was not shy either and he did not understand why she should say that he was, when usually she complained that he was too eager to thrust himself forward. If he wasn't bothering much to talk to Sidney now it was simply because, as she knew, he had a friend of his own age, and so could get on very well without the help of the kind of grown-up who stayed away for weeks at a time without any explanation.

Sankey, glancing down, sensitive as always to the moods of others, saw all this in the child's face, and his mouth, normally a little crooked, dragged farther still to one side.

He hardly knew what was happening to him. He seemed to be split in two, one part of him feeling a deadly fury against both mother and child, the other part feeling all the old comforting sweetness of their presence.

Mary, going to the kitchen, made tea and hot buttered toast, and bringing the tray into the living-room, found Sankey looking thoughtfully at a drawingboard that was balanced on a stool, on which Roddie had recently constructed an elaborate, cathedral-like structure out of safety matches. A little patronizingly, Roddie was explaining to Sankey how he had supported the walls and the spire

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with fuse wire and pins. Sankey, nodding, had a curiously dazed look, as if he could not follow what the child was saying.

One part of him had suddenly thought that all he had to do now was absently put a cigarette in his mouth, light it, and drop the still burning match onto Roddie's cathedral. Almost as if he had already done it, Sankey could see the whole building burst into one great flame. Then he had only to knock over the drawingboard so that Roddie's clothes caught fire. That was all. For Roddie would scream, Mary would try to beat out the flames, her own clothes would catch fire, and her hair, her soft, fair hair . . .

"He did it all by himself, you know," Mary was saying. She had put down the tray and had come to Sankey's side. "Neither of us helped him at all. The fuse wire was all his own idea. We feel a little proud of him."

She was standing so close to Sankey that her sleeve was brushing his. Her fair hair, with the lamplight shining on it, curled on her forehead and against her smooth, plump cheeks. To touch it would be like touching silk. It had a faint scent that seemed to be intimately and uniquely Mary's.

Sankey gave a deep sigh, pocketed the packet of cigarettes and the box of matches that he had just absent-mindedly taken from the mantelpiece, reached out clumsily, and drew Mary to him. He was aware that her body stiffened against his, that she made an attempt to draw away from him, and then stood quite still; but he was not aware how fiercely his arms were crushing her. He had started trembling violently and had tears in his eyes. Nothing in the world seemed to matter except that he should bury his face in her hair.

Oliver Bourne, coming in at that moment from the study where he had been correcting homework, felt his reason consumed in an enormous flame of hatred. Somehow he had the presence of mind to grab Roddie, thrust him out of the room, and close the door. Then he picked up the heavy brass poker from the fireplace and brought it down on to Sidney Sankey's skull.

As Mary shrieked, Bourne struck again and again.

It was only as Sankey's limp body slumped to the ground that the madness died out of Bourne's face, leaving it as dull and empty as Mary had sometimes seen Sankey's.

As she stumbled away from them both to the door, Bourne let the poker slip out of his fingers onto the carpet.

"Wait!" he croaked.

Mary turned, leaning against the door, clutching at the handle to stop herself from falling. She had thought first, when she saw her husband with the poker held high over Sankey's head, that he meant to kill her too.

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Bourne muttered something that seemed to be mainly a repetition of her name, then again he said hoarsely, "Wait!" Pressing his hands to his temples, he stood quite still, looking blankly at Sankey's body, as if he knew neither what it was nor how it had come there.

Mary could not bear to look at Sankey. She kept her eyes on her husband's grey, vacant face and so saw expression return to it. For a moment this seemed as terrifying as the sight of Sankey's battered head, for the expression that appeared, businesslike, determined, competent, was one so familiar to her, so normal, that it left her straying wits no possibility of escape from the knowledge that this man, whom she knew so well, was a murderer.

Bourne stooped and searched quickly through Sankey's pockets. All that he appeared to be searching for were his own cigarettes, for as soon as he found them he straightened up, thrusting them into his own pocket.

"Mary, can you handle Roddie?" he asked sharply.

"Handle him?" she said helplessly.

"Persuade him that he didn't see Sankey today?"

"I don't know how."

"Then persuade him that he must never tell anyone about it. That it's a secret."

That seemed to her less impossible, since all children love secrets.

"I can try," she said.

"Then go on—do it."

"What are you going to do—with—?"

"I'll tell you when I've done it. For now, just remember you never saw Sankey today. You or Roddie. You haven't seen him for weeks."

"For weeks," Mary echoed stupidly; then she turned swiftly, jerked at the door handle, and escaped from the room.

As soon as she went out of it she started to cry hopelessly and noisily. The sound brought Roddie running to her. She cried fairly often, yet whenever she did so he always had the feeling that it was something unbearable that had never happened before and that he would do anything in the whole world to stop it.

Now what he had to do, it seemed, was promise never to tell anybody that Sidney Sankey had been in the house that day. That was an easy thing to do. He wasn't interested in Sidney any more and didn't see why anyone else should be. But the trouble was that even when he had given the promise, his mother's tears did not stop. Mary had a terrified conviction that she had forgotten something that was vital to Oliver's safety, and what was worse, had a wild horror of even trying to remember it.

The news of Sidney Sankey's death was in the newspapers the next day. His body had been found, late in the evening, on a railway

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line a short distance from the town. In the short paragraph devoted to this fact no mention was made of foul play being suspected, and Sidney's landlady was quoted as having said that she really wasn't at all surprised, because, poor boy, he'd been in a terrible state of depression for a long time.

Next day that was what Sidney's colleagues said too, both among themselves and to a Detective-Inspector who appeared at the school in the afternoon to ask a few not particularly searching questions.

All the masters to whom he spoke, and that included Oliver Bourne, said that they had noticed and been greatly worried by Sankey's recent air of dejection. Some of them said that they had wished they had known how to help him, others remembered prophesying that he would never last the year out. The Detective-Inspector went away looking neither particularly interested nor thoughtful.

But that was because he had trained himself not to show interest or thoughtfulness, except when it might be useful to do so. In fact, something that had happened while he had been talking to the senior history master had roused his interest and struck him as deserving more than a little thought.

During the interview Oliver Bourne had smoked several cigarettes. As he had stuck each one between his lips, he had brought a match box out of his pocket, taken out a match, and struck it on the box. But each time the match had failed to light. Cursing absently, Bourne had thrown the match into the wastepaper-basket and accepted a light from the Inspector.

The last time this had occurred, just as the Inspector had been leaving, Bourne had not troubled to return the match box to his pocket but had left it lying on his desk, the Inspector had unobtrusively pocketed it himself. On his way back to the police station he verified what he thought he had observed about the matches while talking to Bourne. They were safety matches, yet the box that they were in was of the kind intended for matches that will strike on anything, from the sole of a boot to a thumbnail.

And that, the Inspector thought, was an odd thing to carry in one's pocket, since the combination was entirely useless.

The uselessness of it—the complete pointlessness of having carefully filled an ordinary match box with safety matches—made it a far odder thing to carry than a safety match box filled with ordinary matches which the dead man on the railway line had had in *his* pocket. The Inspector, as a matter of fact, had not thought that there was anything particularly unusual about those matches in that match box. He had supposed that Sidney Sankey had run out of the safety matches that he had been carrying,

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and had been helped out by someone who had happened to have only the other kind.

Even now the Inspector did not attach too much importance to the complementary character of the match boxes in the two men's pockets. However, several people had told him that the Bournes were the only people in Bardley with whom Sankey had even tried to make friends; so in spite of Bourne's statement that he had scarcely spoken to Sankey for a couple of months, the Inspector decided to pay the Bournes' home a visit.

He was not, until he reached it, looking for a murderer—only for the motive for a suicide. Yet as soon as he had entered the Bournes' living-room he started to ask himself certain questions. Why, for instances, did a patch of the carpet look as if it had been recently cleaned? Why was the heavy brass poker on the hearth so bright that it could only have been cleaned that morning, while the other fire irons and the brass fender had a faint tarnish? Why were Mary Bourne's eyelids swollen with weeping and her eyes so blank with fear?

Oliver Bourne had not yet come home from the school. When the Inspector, accompanied by a self-effacing sergeant, rang the doorbell, Mary had been sitting by the fire, mending one of Roddie's jerseys, while Roddie had been playing in a corner, adding a wing to his cathedral. He took no notice of the Inspector's arrival or of the things that he and Mary said to one another about Sidney Sankey, for when Roddie set to work, designing and building, he was wholly absorbed. Even when his mother and the stranger started talking about him he did not pay much attention, because, of course, as people always did, they just talked about how dangerous it was for a little boy like him to be playing with matches.

"Yes, we were worried to death when he started it," Mary said, "and tried to get him interested in bricks and Meccano and everything else we could think of. And I suppose that was our mistake. The more we tried to keep matches away from him, the more set he was on matches and nothing but matches. And they're difficult to keep away from a boy who's as active as he is. He'd find them wherever we hid them. So we gave in and got him to promise he'd play only with the ones we gave him and only in the corner over there, away from the fire."

"And he keeps his promise?" the Inspector asked.

"Oh, yes," Mary said. "A promise . . ." But that reminded her of the promise Roddie had given her the day before and of what would happen if he broke it, and her voice dried up. She had to clear her throat before she could continue. "A promise is a very serious thing to a little boy."

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"And you give him safety matches," the Inspector said, "in the non-safety sort of box."

Mary was surprised at how quickly he had guessed Oliver's device for protecting Roddie from the dangerous consequences of his passion.

"Yes, and my husband uses up the non-safety matches, keeping them in the safety match boxes we've emptied," she said, "and we leave them up there on the mantelpiece and Roddie never touches them because of his promise."

On that word her voice again dried up.

She raised a hand that felt icy cold to her mouth.

She knew now what it was that she had forgotten the evening before—when she had seen Oliver searching through Sankey's pockets to recover the pack of cigarettes which he had guessed would inevitably have found their way there and which would certainly have Oliver's fingerprints on it. She had forgotten the box of matches, which she had actually seen Sankey pocket at the same time as the cigarettes, as she came into the room with the tea tray.

She had forgotten because she had not wanted to remember—not with the new fear she had of her husband.

That the police now knew was clear, for there were the two match boxes, or two just like them, side by side in the Inspector's hand.

Oliver Bourne, coming in at that moment, saw them also and understood what they meant. He thought, as he had thought the day before, that he had again caught Mary in an act of betrayal. His rage was so sudden and violent as it had been the day before, yet it was still against Sidney Sankey and all that he had done to the Bournes, beginning with his crazy instruction of a child of five in the pleasure of playing with matches. It was at the image of Sidney Sankey that Oliver hurled his lighted cigarette, though where it fell was on Roddie's cathedral.

As it exploded into a sheet of flame, Mary screamed and snatched at Roddie. But as she swung him away, one of his shoes caught a corner of the drawingboard on which the cathedral stood and overturned it on Oliver's feet.

The self-effacing sergeant who had arrived with the Inspector wrenched at the hearthrug and hurled himself at the burning mass in an attempt to smother the flames; but Oliver only fought him off, trying to escape from him and from the fire. In a sense he did escape from the police, for he did not live to stand trial, but died that night in the hospital of burns and shock—and of his all-consuming hatred for Sidney Sankey.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***Seek, and Ye Shall Find***

TYPE: Puzzle Story

DETECTIVES: Blunt's Brilliant Detectives

LOCALE: England

TIME: Christmas—circa 1924

COMMENTS: *Tommy and Tuppence Beresford—the English Mr. and Mrs. North—help a clergyman's daughter in distress by solving the secret of the Red House . . . Merry Christmas!*

"I WISH," SAID TUPPENCE BERESFORD, roaming moodily round the office, "that we could befriend a clergyman's daughter."

"Why?" asked Tommy.

"You may have forgotten the fact, but I was once a clergyman's daughter myself. I remember what it was like. Hence this altruistic urge—this spirit of thoughtful consideration for others—this—"

"You are getting ready to be Roger Sheringham, I see," said Tommy. "If you will allow me to make a criticism, you talk quite as much as he does, but not nearly so well."

"On the contrary," said Tuppence, "there is a feminine subtlety about my conversation, a *je ne sais quoi,* that no gross male could ever attain. I have, moreover, powers unknown to my prototype—do I mean prototype? Words are such uncertain things, they so often sound well but mean the opposite of what one thinks they do."

"Go on," said Tommy kindly.

"I was. I was only pausing to take breath. Touching these powers, it is my wish today to assist a clergyman's daughter. You will see, Tommy, the first person to enlist the aid of Blunt's Brilliant Detectives will be a clergyman's daughter."

"I'll bet you it isn't, said Tommy.

"Done," said Tuppence. "Hist!

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To your typewriters—one comes."

Mr. Blunt's office was humming with industry as Albert opened the door and announced: "Miss Monica Deane."

A slender brown-haired girl, rather shabbily dressed, entered and stood hesitating. Tommy came forward.

"Good morning, Miss Deane. Won't you sit down and tell us what we can do for you? By the way, let me introduce my confidential secretary, Miss Sheringham."

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Deane," said Tuppence. "Your father was in the Church, I think."

"Yes, he was. But how *did* you know that?"

"Oh, well we have our methods," said Tuppence. "You mustn't mind me rattling on. Mr. Blunt likes to hear me talk. He always says it gives him ideas."

The girl stared at her. She was a slender creature, not beautiful, but possessing a wistful prettiness. Her eyes were blue and very lovely, though the dark shadows round them spoke of trouble and anxiety.

"Will you tell me your story, Miss Deane?" said Tommy.

The girl turned to him gratefully.

"It's such a long, rambling story," she said. "My name is Monica Deane. My father was the rector of Little Hampsley in Suffolk. He died three years ago, and my mother and I were left very badly off. I went out as a governess, but my mother became a confirmed invalid and I had to come home to look after her. We were desperately poor, but one day we received a lawyer's letter telling us that an aunt of my father's had died and had left everything to me. I had often heard of this aunt who had quarreled with my father many years ago, and I knew that she was very well off, so it really seemed that our troubles were at an end. But matters did not turn out quite as we hoped. I inherited the house she had lived in, but after paying one or two small legacies, there was no money left. I suppose she must have lost it during the war, or perhaps she had been living on her capital. Still, we had the house, and almost at once we had a chance of selling it at quite an advantageous price. But, foolishly perhaps, I refused the offer. We were in tiny, but expensive lodgings, and I thought it would be much nicer to live in The Red House where my mother could have comfortable rooms and take in paying guests to cover our expenses.

"I kept to this plan, notwithstanding a further tempting offer from the gentlemen who wanted to buy. We moved in, and I advertised for paying guests. For a time all went well, we had several answers to our advertisement, my aunt's old servant remained on with us, and she and I between us did the work of the house. And

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then these unaccountable things began to happen."

"What things?"

"The queerest things. The whole place seemed bewitched. Pictures fell down, crockery flew across the room and broke, and one morning we came down to find all the furniture moved round. At first we thought someone was playing a practical joke, but we had to give up that explanation. Sometimes when we were all sitting down to dinner, a terrific crash would be heard overhead. We would go up and find no one there—nothing but a piece of furniture thrown violently to the ground."

"A poltergeist," cried Tuppence, much interested.

"Yes, that's what Dr. O'Neill said—though I don't know what it means."

"It's a sort of evil spirit that plays tricks," explained Tuppence who in reality knew very little of the subject, and was not even sure that she had got the word poltergeist right.

"Well, at any rate the effect was disastrous. Our visitors were frightened to death and left as soon as possible. We got new ones, and they too left hurriedly. I was in despair and, to crown it all, our income ceased suddenly—the Company in which it was invested failed."

"You poor dear," said Tuppence sympathetically. "What a time you have had. Did you want Mr. Blunt to investigate this 'haunting' business?"

"Not exactly. You see, three days ago a gentleman called upon us. His name was Dr. O'Neill. He told us that he was a member of the Society for Physical Research, and that he had heard about the curious manifestations that had taken place in our house and was much interested. So much so, that he was prepared to buy it from us and conduct a series of experiments there."

"Well?"

"Of course, at first, I was overcome with joy. It seemed the way out of all our difficulties. But—"

"Yes?"

"Perhaps you will think me fanciful. Perhaps I am. But—oh, I'm sure I haven't made a mistake. It was the same man!"

"What same man?"

"The same man who wanted to buy it before. Oh, I'm sure I'm right."

"But why shouldn't it be?"

"You don't understand. The two men were quite different, different name and everything. The first man was young, a spruce dark young man of thirty-odd. Dr. O'Neill is about fifty, he has a gray beard and wears glasses and stoops. But when he talked I saw a gold tooth on one side of his mouth. It only shows when he laughs. The other man had a tooth in just the same position, and then I looked at his ears. I had noticed the other man's ears because

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they were a peculiar shape with hardly any lobe. Dr. O'Neill's were exactly the same. Both things couldn't be a coincidence, could they? I thought and thought and finally I wrote and said I would let him know in a week. I had noticed Mr. Blunt's advertisement some time ago—as a matter of fact in an old paper that lined one of the kitchen drawers. I cut it out and came up to town."

"You were quite right," said Tuppence, nodding her head with vigor. "This needs looking into."

"A very interesting case, Miss Deane," observed Tommy. "We shall be pleased to look into this for you—eh, Miss Sheringham?"

"Rather," said Tuppence, "and we'll get to the bottom of it too."

"I understand, Miss Deane," went on Tommy, "that the household consists of you and your mother and a servant. Can you give me any particulars about the servant?"

"Her name is Crockett. She was with my aunt about eight or ten years. She is an elderly woman, not very pleasant in manner, but a good servant. She is inclined to give herself airs because her sister married out of her station. Crockett has a nephew whom she is always telling us is 'quite the gentleman'."

"Hm," said Tommy, rather at a loss how to proceed.

Tuppence had been eyeing Monica keenly, now she spoke with sudden decision.

"I think the best plan would be for Miss Deane to come out and lunch with me. It's just on one o'clock. I can get full details from her."

"Certainly, Miss Sheringham," said Tommy. "An excellent plan."

"Look here," said Tuppence when they were comfortably ensconced at a little table in a neighborhood restaurant, "I want to know. Is there any special reason why you want to find out about all this?"

Monica blushed. "Well, you see—"

"Out with it," said Tuppence encouragingly.

"Well—there are two men who—who—want to marry me."

"The usual story, I suppose? One rich, one poor, and the poor one is the one you like!"

"I don't know how you know all these things," murmured the girl.

"That's a sort of law of Nature," explained Tuppence. "It happens to everybody. It happened to me."

"You see, even if I sell the house, it won't bring us enough to live on. Gerald is a dear, but he's desperately poor—though he's a very clever engineer and if only he had a little capital, his firm would take him into partnership. The other, Mr. Partridge, is a very good man, I am sure—and well off, and if I married him it would be an end of all our troubles. But—but—"

"I know," said Tuppence sympathetically. "It isn't the same thing at all. You can go on telling yourself how good and worthy he is, and

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adding up his qualities as though they were an addition sum—and it all has a simply refrigerating effect."

Monica nodded.

"Well," said Tuppence, "I think it would be as well if we went down and studied matters on the spot. What is the address?"

"The Red House, Stourton-in-the-Marsh."

Tuppence wrote down the address in her notebook.

"I didn't ask you," Monica began, "about terms—" She ended, blushing a little.

"Our payments are strictly by results," said Tuppence gravely. "If the secret of The Red House is a profitable one, as seems possible from the anxiety displayed to acquire the property, we should expect a small percentage, otherwise—nothing!"

"Thank you very much," said the girl gratefully.

"And now," said Tuppence, "don't worry. Everything's going to be all right. Let's enjoy lunch and talk of interesting things."

"Well," said Tommy, looking out of the window of the Crown and Anchor, "here we are at Toad-in-the-Hole—or whatever this blasted village is called."

"Let us review the case," said Tuppence.

"By all means," said Tommy. "To begin with, getting my say in first, *I* suspect the invalid mother."

"Why?"

"My dear Tuppence, grant that this poltergeist business is all a put-up job, got up in order to persuade the girl to sell the house, someone must have thrown the things about. Now the girl said everyone was at dinner—but if the mother is a thoroughgoing invalid she'd be upstairs in her room."

"If she was an invalid she could hardly throw furniture about."

"Ah, but she wouldn't be a real invalid. She'd be shamming."

"Why?"

"There you have me," confessed her husband. "I was really going on the well-known principle of suspecting the most unlikely person."

"You always make fun of everything," said Tuppence severely. "There must be *something* that makes these people so anxious to get hold of the house. And if you don't care about getting to the bottom of this matter, I do. I like that girl. She's a dear."

Tommy nodded seriously enough.

"I quite agree. But I never can resist ragging you, Tuppence. Of course there's something queer about the house, and whatever it is, it's something that's difficult to get at. Otherwise a mere burglary would do the trick. But to be willing to buy the house means either that you've got to take up floors or pull down walls, or else that there's a coal mine under the back garden."

"I don't want it to be a coal mine. Buried treasure is much more romantic."

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"Hm," said Tommy. "In that case I think that I shall pay a visit to the local Bank Manager, explain that I am staying here over Christmas and probably buying The Red House, and discuss the question of opening an account."

"But why—?"

"Wait and see."

Tommy returned at the end of half an hour. His eyes were twinkling.

"We advance, Tuppence. Our interview proceeded on the lines indicated. I then asked casually whether he had had much gold paid in, as is often the case nowadays in these small country banks—small farmers who hoarded it during the war, you understand. From that we proceeded quite naturally to the extraordinary vagaries of old ladies. I invented an aunt who, on the outbreak of the war, drove to the Army and Navy Stores in a four-wheeler and returned with sixteen hams. He immediately mentioned a client of his own who had insisted on drawing out every penny of money she had—in gold as far as possible—and who also insisted on having her securities, bearer bonds, and such things given into her own custody. I exclaimed on such an act of folly and he mentioned casually that she was the former owner of The Red House. You see, Tuppence? She drew out all this money, and she hid it somewhere. You remember that Monica Deane mentioned that they were astonished at the small amount of her estate? Yes, she hid it in The Red House, and someone knows about it. I can make a pretty good guess who that someone is too."

"Who?"

"What about the faithful Crockett? She would know all about her mistress's peculiarities."

"And that gold-toothed Dr. O'Neill?"

"The gentlemanly nephew, of course! That's it. But whereabouts did she hide it? You know more about old ladies than I do, Tuppence. Where do they hide things?"

"Wrapped up in stockings and petticoats, and under mattresses."

Tommy nodded. "I expect you're right. All the same, she can't have done that because it would have been found when her things were turned over. It worries me—you see, an old lady like that can't have taken up floors or dug holes in the garden. All the same, it's there in The Red House somewhere. Crockett hasn't found it, but she knows it's there, and once they get the house to themselves, she and her precious nephew, they can turn it upside down until they land what they're after. We've got to get ahead of them. Come on, Tuppence. We'll go to The Red House."

Monica Deane received them. To her mother and Crockett they were represented as would-be purchasers of The Red House, which would account for their being taken all over the house and grounds. Tom-

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my did not tell Monica of the conclusions he had come to, but he asked her various searching questions. Of the garments and personal belongings of the dead woman, some had been given to Crockett and the others sent to various poor families. Everything had been gone through most carefully.

"Did your aunt leave any papers?"

"The desk was full, and there were some in a drawer in her bedroom, but there was nothing of importance amongst them."

"Have they been thrown away?"

"No, my mother is always very loath to throw away old papers. There were some old-fashioned recipes which she intends to go through one day."

"Good," said Tommy approvingly. Then, indicating an old man who was at work on one of the flower beds in the garden, he asked, "Was he here in your aunt's time?"

"Yes, he used to come three days a week. He lives in the village. Poor old fellow, he is past doing any really useful work. We have him just once a week to keep things tidied up. We can't afford more."

Tommy winked at Tuppence to indicate that she was to keep Monica with her, and he himself stepped across to where the gardener was working. He spoke a few pleasant words to the old man, asked him if he had been there in the old lady's time, and then said casually, "You buried a box for her once, didn't you?"

"No, sir, I never buried naught for her. What should she want to bury a box for?"

Tommy shook his head. He strolled back to the house, frowning. It was to be hoped that a study of the old lady's papers would yield some clue—otherwise the problem was a hard one to solve. The house itself was old-fashioned, but not old enough to contain a secret room or passage.

Before leaving, Monica brought them a big cardboard box, tied with string.

"I've collected all the papers," she whispered. "They're in here. I thought you could take it away with you, and then you'll have plenty of time to go over them—but I'm sure you won't find anything to throw light on the mysterious happenings in this house—"

Her words were interrupted by a terrific crash overhead. Tommy ran quickly up the stairs. A jug and basin in one of the front rooms was lying on the ground broken to pieces. There was no one in the room.

"The ghost up to its tricks again," he murmured with a grin.

He went downstairs again thoughtfully.

"I wonder, Miss Deane, if I might speak to Crockett for a minute."

"Certainly."

Monica went off to the kitchen and returned with the elderly maid who had opened the door to them earlier.

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"We are thinking of buying this house," said Tommy pleasantly, "and my wife was wondering whether, in that case, you would care to remain on with us?"

Crockett's respectable face displayed no emotion of any sort.

"Thank you, sir," she said. "I should like to think it over if I may."

Tommy turned to Monica. "I am delighted with the house, Miss Deane. I understand that there is another buyer in the market. I know what he has offered for the house, and I will willingly give a hundred more. And mind you, that is a good price I am offering."

Monica murmured something noncommittal, and the Beresfords took their leave.

"I was right," said Tommy, as they went down the drive. "Crockett's in it. Did you notice that she was out of breath? That was from running down the back stairs after smashing the jug and basin. Sometimes, very likely, she has admitted her nephews secretly, and he has done a little poltergeisting, or whatever you call it, whilst she has been innocently with the family. You'll see, Dr. O'Neill will make a higher offer before the day is out."

True enough, after dinner a note was brought. It was from Monica.

"I have just heard from Dr. O'Neill. He raised his previous offer by 150."

"The nephew must be a man of means," said Tommy thoughtfully. "And I tell you what, Tuppence, the prize he's after must be well worthwhile."

"If only we could find it!"

"Well, let's get on with the spade work."

They were sorting through the big box of papers—a wearisome affair, as they were all jumbled up pell mell without any kind of order or method. Every few minutes they compared notes.

"What's the latest, Tuppence?"

"Two old receipted bills, three unimportant letters, a recipe for preserving new potatoes and one for making lemon cheesecake. What's yours?"

"One bill, a poem on Spring, two newspaper cuttings: 'Why Women Buy Pearls—A Sound Investment' and 'Man With Four Wives—Extraordinary Story,' and a recipe for Jugged Hare."

"It's heartbreaking," said Tuppence, and they fell to once more. At last the box was empty. They looked at each other.

"I put this aside," said Tommy, picking up a half sheet of note paper, "because it struck me as peculiar. But I don't suppose it's got anything to do with what we're looking for."

"Let's see it. Oh, it's one of those funny things—what do they call them? Anagrams, charades, or something." She read it:

"My *first* you put on glowing coal
And into it you put my *whole*

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My *second* really is the first
My third mislikes the winter blast."

"Hm," said Tommy critically. "I don't think much of the poet's rhymes."

"I don't see what you find peculiar about it, though," said Tuppence. "Everybody used to have a collection of these things about fifty years ago. You saved them up for winter evenings round the fire."

"I wasn't referring to the verse. It's the words written below it that strike me as peculiar.

"St. Luke XI. 9," she read. "It's a text."

"Yes. Doesn't that strike you as odd? Would an old lady of a religious persuasion write a text just under a charade?"

"It is rather odd," agreed Tuppence.

"I presume that you, being a clergyman's daughter, have got your Bible with you?"

"As a matter of fact, I have. Aha, you didn't expect that. Wait a sec."

Tuppence ran to her suitcase and extracted a small red volume. She turned the leaves rapidly. "Here we are. Luke, Chapter XI, Verse 9. Oh, Tommy, look."

Tommy bent over and looked where Tuppence's small finger pointed to a portion of the verse in question.

"Seek, and ye shall find."

"That's it," cried Tuppence. "We've got it! Solve the charade and the treasure is ours—or rather Monica's."

"Well, let's get to work on it. 'My *first* you put on glowing coal'. What does that mean, I wonder? Then—'My *second* really is the first.' That's pure gibberish."

"It's quite simple really," said Tuppence kindly. "It's just sort of knack. Let *me* have it."

Tommy surrendered it willingly. Tuppence ensconced herself in an armchair and began muttering to herself with bent brows.

"It's quite simple really," murmured Tommy when half an hour had elapsed.

"Don't crow! We're the wrong generation for this. I've a good mind to go back to town tomorrow and call on some old pussy who would probably read it as easy as winking. It's a knack, that's all."

"Well, let's have one more try."

"There aren't many things you can put on glowing coal," said Tuppence. "There's water, to put it out, or wood, or a kettle."

"It must be one syllable, I suppose? What about *wood*, then?"

"You couldn't put anything *into* wood, though."

"There's no one syllable word instead of *water*, but there must be one syllable things you can put on a fire in the kettle line."

"Saucepans," mused Tuppence. "Frying pans. How about *pan*? Or *pot*? What's a word beginning pan or pot that is something you cook?"

"Pottery," suggested Tommy. "You bake that in the fire. Wouldn't that be near enough?"

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"The rest of it doesn't fit. Pancakes? No. Oh, bother."

They were interrupted by the little serving maid, who told them that dinner would be ready in a few minutes.

"Only Mrs. Lumley, she wanted to know if you'd like your potatoes fried or boiled in their jackets? She's got some of each."

"Boiled in their jackets," said Tuppence promptly. "I love potatoes—" She stopped dead with her mouth open.

"What's the matter, Tuppence? Have you seen a ghost?"

"Tommy," cried Tuppence. "Don't you see? That's it! The word, I mean. *Potatoes!* 'My first you put on glowing coal'—that's *pot*. 'And into it you put my whole'. 'My *second* really is the first' That's A, the first letter of the alphabet. 'My *third* mislikes the wintry blast"—cold *toes* of course!"

"You're right, Tuppence, and very clever of you. But I'm afraid we've wasted an awful lot of time over nothing. Potatoes don't fit in at all with missing treasure. Half a sec., though. What did you read out just now, when we were going through the box? Something about a recipe for New Potatoes. I wonder if there's anything in that."

He rummaged hastily through the pile of recipes.

"Here it is. *TO KEEP NEW POTATOES. Put the new potatoes into tins and bury them in the garden. Even in the middle of winter they will taste as though freshly dug.*"

"We've got it," screamed Tuppence. "That's it. The treasure is in the garden, buried in a tin."

"But I asked the gardener. He said he'd never buried anything."

"Yes, I know, but that's because people never really answer what you say, they answer what they think you mean. He knew he'd never buried anything out of the common. We'll go tomorrow and ask him where he buried the potatoes."

The following morning they found the old gardener's cottage. Tuppence broached the subject after some minutes' conversation.

"I wish one could have new potatoes at Christmas time," she remarked. "Wouldn't they be good with turkey? Do people round here ever bury them in tins? I've heard that keeps them fresh."

"Ay, that they do," declared the old man. "Old Miss Deane, up to The Red House, she allus had three tins buried every summer, and as often as not forgot to have 'em dug up again."

"In the bed by the house, as a rule, didn't she?"

"No, over against the wall by the fir tree."

Having got the information they wanted, they took their leave of the old man, presenting him with a pound as a Christmas gift.

"And now for Monica," said Tommy.

"Tommy! You have no sense of the dramatic. Leave it to me. I've

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got a beautiful plan. Do you think you could manage to beg, borrow, or steal a spade?"

Somehow or other, a spade was duly produced, and that night, late, two figures might have been seen stealing into the grounds of The Red House. The place indicated by the gardener was easily found, and Tommy set to work. Presently his spade rang on metal and a few seconds later he had unearthed a big biscuit tin. It was sealed round with adhesive plaster, but Tuppence, by the aid of Tommy's knife, soon managed to open it. Then she gave a groan. The tin was pull of potatoes. She poured them out so that the tin was completely empty, but there were no other contents.

"Go on digging, Tommy."

It was some time before a second tin rewarded their search. As before Tuppence unsealed it.

"Well?" demanded Tommy anxiously.

"Potatoes again!"

"Damn!" said Tommy and began digging again.

"The third time is lucky," said Tuppence consolingly.

"I believe the whole thing's a mare's nest," said Tommy gloomily.

At last a third tin came to light.

"Potatoes aga—" began Tuppence, then stopped. "Oh! Tommy, we've got it. It's only potatoes on top. Look!"

She held up a big old-fashioned velvet bag.

"Cut along home," cried Tommy. "It's icy cold. Take the bag with you. I must just shovel back the earth. And may a thousand curses light upon your head, Tuppence, if you open that bag before I get there!"

"I'll play fair. Ouch, I'm frozen."

On arrival at the Inn she had not long to wait. Tommy was hard on her heels, perspiring freely after his digging and the final brisk run.

"Now then," said Tommy. "The private inquiry agents make good! Open the loot, Mrs. Beresford."

Inside the bag was a package done up in oil silk and a heavy chamois leather bag. They opened the latter first. It was full of gold sovereigns. Tommy counted them.

"Two hundred pounds. That was all they would let her have, I suppose. Cut open the package."

Tuppence did so. It was full of closely folded banknotes. Tommy and Tuppence counted them carefully. They amounted to exactly twenty thousand pounds!

"Whew!" said Tommy. "Isn't it lucky for Monica that we're both rich and honest? What's that done up in tissue paper?"

Tuppence unrolled the little parcel and drew out a magnificent string of pearls, exquisitely matched.

"I don't know much about these things," said Tommy slowly, "but I'm pretty sure that those pearls are worth another few thousand pounds at least. Look at the size of them. Now I see why the old lady kept that cutting about pearls being a

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good investment. She must have realized all her securities and turned them into banknotes and jewels."

"Oh, Tommy, isn't it wonderful? Darling Monica. Now she can marry her nice young man and live happily ever afterwards, like me."

"That's rather sweet of you, Tuppence. So you *are* happy with me?"

"As a matter of fact," said Tuppence, "I am. But I didn't mean to say so. It slipped out. What with being excited, and Christmas Eve, and one thing and another—"

"If you really love me," said Tommy, "answer me one question."

"I hate these catches," said Tuppence. "But—well, all right."

"Then how did you know that Monica was a clergyman's daughter?"

"Oh, that was just cheating," said Tuppence happily. "I opened her letter making an appointment, and a Mr. Deane was Father's curate once and he had a little girl called Monica, about four or five years younger than me. So I put two and two together."

"You are a shameless creature," said Tommy. "Hello, there's twelve o'clock striking. Happy Christmas, Tuppence."

"Happy Christmas, Tommy."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LENARD KAUFMAN**

TITLE: ***Coup de Grace***

TYPE: Police Investigation

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An unusual story . . . She was only a hat check girl when Mr. Ziggendorf showed an interest in her; and now she was explaining to the police Lieutenant all about Ziggy and the Park Avenue apartment and the Jaguar and the sable coat and the jewels . . .*

CERTAINLY I'LL TAKE A LIE DETECTOR test. I've got nothing to hide. I'll take a lie detector test, a blood test, an intelligence test—anything to make you feel better, Lieutenant . . . Who me? I'm fine . . . .No, I don't need any matron. I feel perfectly safe with you, Lieutenant. Say, wait a *minute*. You're not going to start pawing over me, *searching* me, are you?

Well, I'm glad to hear that. You'd only be wasting your time, anyway. I'm not carrying any concealed weapons, no dope, not even a piece of stolen merchandise. By the way, what's the charge, anyhow? . . . No charge? . . . That's a good word—questioning. Covers a multitude of sins, doesn't it, Lieutenant? Oh, not my sins—*yours*, Lieutenant.

Me? I'm as clean as a whistle—pure as the snow. Listen, I never hurt a fly in my life. I'm the kind of girl who lifts the screen and shoos them out. I just can't *stand* killing and you've got me here on *this* kind of a rap! It just doesn't make sense.

Why, if you only knew me—really knew me—you'd realize how absolutely ridiculous this is. I can't even take the *sight* of blood. I get ill—positively ill. You won't believe this but I wish I had a nickel for every time I almost piled up my Jag just to avoid hitting an ani-

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mal on the road—an *animal,* mind you, and you got me here about Ziggy?

Who's getting excited? I'm just telling you—*trying* to tell you, anyhow. Pass me my bag, will you, Lieutenant? I must look a mess. Huh. I sure do. God, look at this hair, will you. And where did all my make-up go? You don't mind if I put on a face in front of you, Lieutenant, do you? Well, some men do, you know. Most, I'd say. All they want to see is the finished product. Take apart and put together a motor—sure—but a woman, not on your life!

No, you don't have to wait until I'm through. I'm listening. Look, just because I'm a blonde, you don't have to think I'm dizzy, or because I'm beautiful that I'm dumb too. You can carry this guilt-by-association business too far, you know . . . I'm not trying to be funny, Lieutenant, and you don't have to laugh just to be polite.

Okay, so I'm touchy. What do you expect me to be under these circumstances, a cow? I'm in a police station, ain't I? And I'm being third-degreed, ain't I? And after what I been through! Look, Lieutenant, you can consider yourself lucky I'm not having a case of hysterics.

You're asking *me* to understand! That's the trouble with people like you. You're always giving the public that "only-doing-my-job" routine. What do you want, sympathy? You're the kind that pulls the switch and then expects pity along with your pay check. Well, not from me, brother. I'm a citizen and I've got my rights . . . Oh, I pressed the button where it hurts that time, didn't I? And now you're getting nasty, aren't you? Well, go ahead, get nasty and see how far it gets you. Don't forget, *I'm* not a criminal. I came down here of my own free will. I'm cooperating. That's more than I can say for you.

Well! That's better. Of course, I accept your apology. I'm not trying to be difficult, you know. All I want is to be treated like a human being . . . I don't see why we can't start all over—yes, right from the beginning . . . I told you once and I meant it I have no need for a lawyer. I'm not on trial. I'm innocent of any wrongdoing and I don't need any legal advice. Now, shall we get on with it?

Grace Smith. Twenty-four. I can give you my measurements too, if you like . . . Occupation? Are you kidding? I'm a *woman!* . . . You guessed that. How clever of you, Lieutenant . . . In my own words? Well you know perfectly well what happened and, if you don't mind, I'd just as soon skip the gory details . . . Aren't you being pigheaded about this? . . . Oh, yes, for the record. Whatever we do, let's not forget the record . . . All right. I'll try to pull myself together. Here goes.

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I got in about midnight. I left the car with the doorman, took the elevator up to my apartment, and let myself in. I remember I was feeling good, awfully good. Had a wonderful evening, a marvelous date. I was even humming to myself . . . What? . . . No, I always leave the lights on when I'm out. I just can't stand coming home to a dark house . . . Certainly, everything looked all right. As a matter of fact, it looked beautiful. I happen to have a very handsome apartment, Lieutenant. Oh, that's right, you did see it, didn't you.

Well, as I say, I didn't notice anything different. I didn't even *sense* anything and I'm usually pretty good about those things. I just walked in, threw off my coat . . . Yes, this one. Not mink, Lieutenant. If you don't mind—sable . . . That's all right I wouldn't expect you to know the difference—not unless you had to pay for it. Now, where was I? Oh, yes, I threw off my coat, dropped it on the sofa and headed for something comfortable in the master bedroom. I always do before I have my nightcap.

Wait a *minute!* That's when I *did* notice something different. The bedroom door was closed and I never close doors in my house. Closed doors give me the creeps. I like to see what's going on—everywhere.

Of course it bothered me but I thought maybe the maid had closed it—or a breeze or something, you know. Anyway, I pulled it open and oh God there it was. There *he* was—stretched out on my bed in a pool of blood!

I heard someone scream—I guess it must have been me—and the next thing I knew I was out in the hall and the doorman and the elevator operator were picking me off the floor and saying something about calling the police.

What did I *see?* But I told you what I saw—Ziggy! . . . Yes, Mr. Ziggendorf, lying there—dead . . . Do I *have* to? Okay, I'll try. He was fully clothed—even had his hat on and his overcoat and gloves. Am I sure of it? Of course, I'm sure of it. You saw him yourself, didn't you?

Gun? Are you kidding? What do you think I did—go around looking for a gun? Didn't I just get through telling you what killing and the sight of blood does to me? I tell you, I'll never be able to go back to that apartment again. To think that this should happen to me, to *me* of all people!

Please, Lieutenant, don't *lecture* me. I *am* being calm. I *am* trying to tell you everything . . . Yes, I know all about fingerprints. You told me—the gun was on the floor and there were no prints on it. Well, you can't expect to find fingerprints on a gun if a man was wearing gloves, can you? Even *I* know that.

Would you mind repeating that

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last question? . . . Didn't I think it was strange that Ziggy should kill himself with all his clothes on? Now, what kind of a question is that, Lieutenant? How do I know if it was strange? I'm no expert on how people go around killing themselves . . . Oh, they do, huh? *All* the time? . . . Well, there you are. You just can't talk about Ziggy when you're talking about *most* people. He was *Ziggy*—one in a million—the kindest, sweetest guy in the world . . . What do you mean, what was he doing in my apartment? He paid the rent.

Certainly, we were old friends. I met him when I was checking hats over at Duke Reilly's Club. That was two years ago. Gee, time flies, doesn't it? . . . Sure, he was one of my steady customers, three, four times a week, but he wasn't like the rest of those jokers—oh, you know, all those big dealers, promising you the moon and a television program of your own and all that kind of malarkey. I wasn't born yesterday, you know. I knew what they wanted.

Ziggy? Well, sure, but it's the approach that counts. He took his time, didn't give me the old rushero. I'm old-fashioned in that respect, you know. I don't go for these cowboys who are about as subtle as a bull and use everything on you but a rope and spurs. After all, it doesn't hurt to be a gentleman. And Ziggy was that, all right —every inch. I loved that guy.

Oh, about fifty, I guess. I never asked him and he never told me. If a guy is over forty, I usually ignore the subject . . . Sure. He's got a wife and two grown kids. The girl was married and the boy in college. Ziggy was crazy about those kids . . . Her? He never mentioned her. It was one of those *old* marriages—all tired, beat up, and nowhere to go.

Well, that's putting it pretty crudely, Lieutenant. As a matter of fact, it was almost like a proposal. He used to take me home nights from the club. It got to be a habit after a while. And then one night, instead of taking a cab, there was this dreamy Jaguar out front.

"Tonight, we go home in style, Grace," he said to me.

It was a custom job—eight thousand if it was a cent. I positively swooned when I saw it. "Ziggy, it's marvelous. It's just like you."

It really wasn't, Lieutenant. Ziggy was more the Caddy type—short, round, comfortable-looking.

"Not like me, Grace—like you," he says. "That's why I bought it. It's yours if you want it."

"Mine!" I screamed, and you could hear me up and down the length of 52nd Street.

Generous! You don't know the half of it, Lieutenant. That was only the beginning. And it wasn't only the things he bought me. You take that apartment, for instance.

He says to me, "Grace, it's none of my business, but a girl like you

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—a fine, respectable, sensitive girl like you—shouldn't be living in this kind of neighborhood. Don't misunderstand me, now. I know it's all you can afford but you must let me show you a place where I think you belong."

And he takes me up to this two-bedroom job. Park Avenue yet and decorated to the hilt—just the way you saw it, Lieutenant. I drooled all over the place.

"You like it, Grace?" You know, timid-like.

"*Like* it! Ziggy, I'd give my right arm for an apartment like this."

He smiled. "It won't be necessary, Grace. If you like it, it's yours. All you have to do is move in. The rent is paid for the entire two-year lease."

I tell you, Lieutenant, I wept like a baby. And Ziggy took me in his arms and kissed me. It was the first time he ever kissed me. He never got a kiss for the Jaguar—but I made it up to him, I'll say that.

"What would you do if I didn't like this place, Ziggy?" I said to him. "You paid the rent for two years. You furnished it to the last inch of wall-to-wall—it must have cost you a fortune! And suppose I said no? Suppose I said I wouldn't have any part of it? What would you do then? Would you look for another tenant?"

He smiled at me—sweet and gentle as a lamb. "No, Grace. It would have stayed vacant for two years. Maybe, once in a while, I would come up here and spend the night and dream a little—that's all."

Of course, I believed him! Look, Lieutenant, don't go Scotland Yard on me. You just don't know Ziggy, and you can keep your suspicions to yourself . . . All right. I'll tell you about this coat then—this sable that you called a mink. You know how most men give you a coat like this? No, you wouldn't know. Well, I'll tell you. They march in as though they just got through trapping all the animals themselves, individually. And they got it wrapped up in a box with ribbons that floors you even before you see what's inside. And you know what they say? They say something like this: "Throw away that rag you're wearing, baby. You not only got me now, you got yourself a coat to match—a genuine, hundred per cent sable. After all, why not? You're my girl and you got to *look* like my girl."

You know how Ziggy did it, Lieutenant? He came in one night and he had this thing thrown over his arm. Just casual. No box, no ribbons, no wrappings. He drops it on the sofa like it was a hunk of rabbit or ponyskin.

I'm standing there with my eyes bugging out. "Is it *real,* Ziggy? Honest-to-goodness *real?*"

"Would I buy anything else for my little girl?"

I swooped down on it and threw it around me. It was like wrapping

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myself in a cloud of honey. "Oh, Ziggy, you shouldn't have, you just *shouldn't* have!"

"It's nothing to get so excited about, Grace. I happened to read that we're going to have a cold winter this year. It's something extra for you to have around."

Extra! Did you hear that, Lieutenant? Why, the insurance alone on it cost more than that cloth sack I was wearing. Now, do you get the drift? And it was the same with all my clothes and, brother, you should see my clothes. I've got a *wardrobe*—everything from soup to nuts.

How was that again? What do you want, an inventory? . . . That's right. The Jaguar came first. Then the apartment . . . Naturally, I gave up my hat check job . . . No, he didn't *tell* me to. He just suggested it. How long is it going to take before you even begin to understand the poor man, Lieutenant?

No, I haven't forgotten the jewels. I just didn't get to them yet. First, there were the matched pearls. After those, the six-carat square-cut emerald and then the diamond bracelet and diamond watch. Oh, just a lot of stuff like that!

I'll say. He made Santa Claus look like a bum. And let me tell you something. That doesn't include a trip to Europe and a cruise to South America. And what's the use of even mentioning just plain good times—theatre twice a week, night clubs, restaurants. Oh, we had a ball, Lieutenant . . . *Small* fortune? Are you kidding? He used to give me a hundred and fifty dollars a week just for *pin* money.

Did I love him? Wouldn't *you* love him, Lieutenant? . . . I'm *not* begging the question. I think it's a stupid one to begin with . . . Yeah, you're right. Let's skip it. Just the facts, Lieutenant. Never mind the emotions.

His personal life? You mean, outside of me? But I already told you. Ziggy had a wife and two kids —grown kids—a girl and a boy. Me, trouble? No. But they gave Ziggy a hard time—especially the old lady and the girl. Oh, she got a legal separation from him about six months ago and made him pay through the nose.

Sure it bothered him. You know, he kind of felt guilty about the whole thing. But it didn't bother him nearly as much as it did the girl. She had herself a nervous breakdown when she got wind of us and they had to put her away for a while. That hit him hard, real hard.

I don't know why, but everything seemed to go bad for him at once. And it wasn't only his wife and his daughter. His partner started making trouble for him. He said Ziggy was milking the firm and putting them both into bankruptcy. I think he started suit for

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an accounting and began screaming about putting Ziggy in jail—you know, that kind of a mess.

I remember it was only a couple of weeks ago. We were having a drink in the apartment and Ziggy was down—low-down that night. He turned to me and took my hand. There were tears in his eyes.

"Things are very bad, Grace, very bad. Now all I have left is you. All I have left is you."

I tell you, Lieutenant, it just broke my heart. The poor old guy, sitting there, shaking his head, crying like a baby. I didn't know what to do. I just didn't know. I would have done anything to help him—*anything*.

Well, it doesn't take a Sherlock Holmes to figure the whole thing out, Lieutenant . . . Certainly, that's what I think. He just got despondent. Everything piled up on him and—poop! He did it. But why in *my* apartment—in *my* bed—I'll never know. It just wasn't like Ziggy. He was so good, so kind—not a mean bone in his body. It just doesn't make sense, Lieutenant.

Oh, we're not back to *that* again, are we? But I told you. I was out. I had a date last night . . . Yes, and I came up to the apartment alone . . . I can't help it if there were no witnesses . . . It would simplify things if there *were* witnesses? Well, I can't help that. That's *your* problem.

I keep telling you, Lieutenant—I had a date! Of course with a man, and it was the dreamiest date I ever had in my whole life.

Sure, go ahead. Suit yourself. Check all you like . . . What do you mean—do I know his name? Are you kidding, Lieutenant? . . . Ziggy, Jr., that's who.

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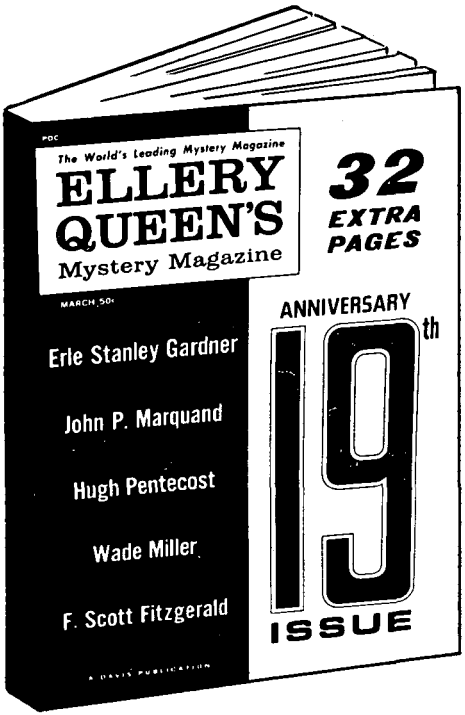

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there's a **NEW** *word for it!*

din'er-out' (din'er-out'), *n.* One who dines away from home, esp. formally.
A brilliant diner-out, though but a curate. — *Byron.*

diners' club (dīn'ers' klūb), *n.* **1.** the term for single credit card-single billing systems. **2.** used in the sense of comprehensive credit covering a wide variety of purchases and services. **3.** pre-established world-wide credit. **4.** a member of a discerning group. **5.** establishments all over the world which honor the Diners' Club Credit Card.

di-nette' (di-net';di-), *n.* [See-ETTE]. **a.** *Brit.* A hot luncheon. **b.** *U.S.* An alcove serving as a dining room in a small apartment.

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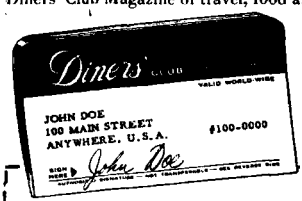

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